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November 1993
Number 37

FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

The Languages of the Rights of Man
Philippe Bénéton

No Other Gods
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The Necessary Devil
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Religion and the Court 1993
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Opinions and Reviews: Robert Bork on John Rawls
Moderately Religious, Desperately Sexual
Speaking for the Common Good • James Finn • David G. Dalin
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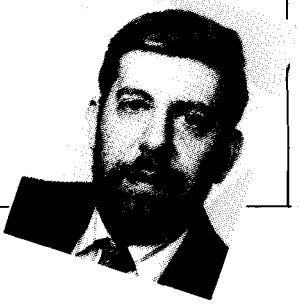

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FIRST THINGS

A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life

NOVEMBER 1993 ● NUMBER 37

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Editor-in-Chief: *Richard John Neuhaus*
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Publisher: *Institute on Religion and Public Life*
Publishing Service: *Publishing Management Associates*

FIRST THINGS: A Monthly Journal of Religion and Public Life (ISSN #1047-5141) is published monthly (except for combined issues June/July and August/September) for $24 per year by The Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010. Second class postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing office. POSTMASTER: send address changes to FIRST THINGS, P.O. Box 3000, Dept. FT, Denville, NJ 07834. **Editorial Offices:** The Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010. **Editorial Phone:** (212) 627-1985. **Advertising Offices:** 129 Phelps Avenue, Suite 312, Rockford, IL 61108. **Advertising Phone:** (815) 398-8569. **Subscription Department:** P.O. Box 3000, Dept. FT, Denville, NJ 07834. 1-800-875-2997. Unsolicited material cannot be returned unless accompanied by sufficient return postage. Newsstand distribution by Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior Street, Sandusky, OH 44870. Copyright © 1993 by The Institute on Religion and Public Life. All rights reserved. Produced in the USA.

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FIRST THINGS is published by Religion and Public Life, an interreligious, nonpartisan research and education institute whose purpose is to advance a religiously informed public philosophy for the ordering of society. RPL also sponsors scholars conferences, consultations, research projects, public educational events, and a fellows program.

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Dealing With Gay Advocacy

The excellent and superbly presented article by Jerry Z. Muller, "Coming Out Ahead: The Homosexual Moment in the Academy" (August/September), contains an interesting paradox.

The paradox involves the following questions: Who benefits most from such an impressive presentation? Who profits from such genius? Are we who oppose the homosexual activists doing our own position any real good by devoting so much time, effort, and talent to that which is essentially indefensible?

I know that Professor Muller's central interest is in serving the truth (which he does exceedingly well), but I wonder if such articles do not in an unwitting way tend to give an apparent and undeserved legitimacy to the arguments of the militant homosexual advocates. . . .

Of course in the realm of truth every effort is worth the time, but I sometimes wonder how much good we really do ourselves in the political and public order with such presentations. After all, when dealing with antagonists who cavalierly dismiss fundamental reality with a simple wave of the hand, shouldn't we just as cavalierly dismiss their indefensible assertions? With opponents who deny first and self-evident principles . . . and who disallow any challenge or questioning of their own position, maintaining that power determines truth and that reality consists of mere mental and arbitrary constructs, is there any reasonable way of proceeding? Is it possible to reason with the irrational?

It seems to me wholly appropriate to give a more truncated Chestertonian type of rejoinder to such opponents. We should simply list the consequences of their principles as they must necessarily unfold in areas such as education, biology, philosophy, medicine, and the like, letting the absurdity of their positions stand in the full light of day. This, I believe, is a sufficient response for the homosexuals of academe and it has the advantage of not appearing to give credence to error in defense of truth. . . .

Arthur J. Delaney, Jr.
Philadelphia, PA

Jerry Muller's article is both a sobering and frightening look at what is possible when all things are considered ethically permissible.

When one considers the extent to which the Christian church is embracing major tenets of feminism, one cannot help but wonder if the ancient church father Tertullian was right in asking, "What has Athens to do with Jerusalem, the Academy with the Church?" His conclusion becomes more apparent as we view with dismay the trends in the Academy. "To know nothing against the rule of Faith is to know everything." (*De Praescript. 7*)

(The Rev.) Paul T. McCain
Assistant to the President
The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod
St. Louis, MO

A Word of Praise

From what is again a marvelous issue, let me single out Camille S. Williams, "Sparrows and Lilies" (August/September).

I read it aloud recently at the closing gathering in St. Louis of nine now septuagenarian nurses (out of an original class of thirteen) celebrating the golden anniversary of their graduation from the Lutheran Hospital School of Nursing in 1943 (my wife among them). When I finished reading, there was not a dry eye in the room, including mine.

Here, in simple and wholesome honesty, is the wisdom of oneness and mutual honor in the relationship of a man and a woman, which the self-conscious and impoverished propagandists of our time so sadly lack—an understanding also of pain with purpose, of children in a family, of the sanctity of every human life, and of a privileged and fitting place in the flow of the generations.

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The group wanted copies, and I made them. I expect that these women will be sharing the piece in their nine scattered states. I wish many more could know it.

(The Rev.) Paul G. Bretscher
Valparaiso, IN

Revelation and Revelatory Truth

The apostle Paul used the Athenians' altar inscription *To an Unknown God* as a beginning point in his proclamation of the gospel to them (Acts 17:23). Is this altar and the impulse that caused it to be erected what Peter Berger ("God in a World of Gods," August/September) considers to be one of those "bits of revelatory truth in places far removed from the Judeo-Christian drama"? If so, then the actions of Paul are instructive with regard to the "mythological matrix." If, however, Mr. Berger means to be more accepting of "bits of revelatory truth," then what does it mean to stress the centrality of biblical revelation? Does not any questioning of the uniqueness of Christ disagree with Jesus' own claims about himself and the exclusive language of the biblical revelation?

Dune Nieuwsma
Battle Creek, MI

A New Colonialism?

Concerning Richard John Neuhaus' discussion of Paul Johnson's proposal for a new UN trusteeship system ("A Radical Proposal," The Public Square, August/September):

Anglo-Saxon regimes and races have a curious urge to "save the world"—from sin and its secular variants like nondemocratic regimes, and now, in Fr. Neuhaus' words, from the status of "failed nations." A strange recommendation in view of the failure of Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, and George Bush to save the world, make it safe for democracy, abolish fear, and institute a new world order. The recommendation is even more misplaced in the eyes of one like me who saw the Congo in the early 1960s occupied by UN troops, mostly from India, who plundered the territory, appropriated UN matérial and weapons, and whom the population feared and detested. From the Congo to Somalia, Cambodia, and Bosnia, the UN has done precious little to be entrusted with rule over "failed nations." Besides, who is going to define "failure"? Big Brother?

On a more theoretical plane, why not consider that failure in the Third World may be, just may be, the consequence of Western imposition of political structures—democracy, pluralism, even statehood—that are alien to local tradition and mentality. If so, the Western doctor cures with one hand and causes disease with the other. I shudder in anticipation of the day of UN tutelage over the "failed nation" of Hungary, decided, let's say, with the votes of Bucharest and Belgrade.

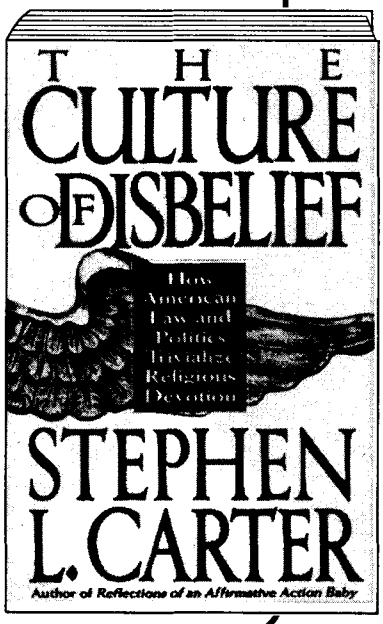
Finally, is the United States so pure (elsewhere in the issue Fr. Neuhaus speaks of the "stench of decaying empire"), so secure from failure itself, that we can confidently dictate to a world that has recently gotten rid of another uninvited tutor?

Thomas Molnar
Ridgewood, NJ

Is it heresy to be religious?

In a nation where 96% of all adults say they believe in God, we encourage arguments from virtually every perspective except one: the religious. Does the doctrine of separation of church and state really require that religion be banned from public discourse? Should people who make political judgments based on faith be dismissed as anti-intellectual or right wing? Noted constitutional scholar Carter argues that the answer to both questions is no.

"I urge you all to read it, from whatever political as well as religious spectrum you have."
—President Bill Clinton



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Opinion

Moderately Religious, Desperately Sexual

George A. Tobin

The most surprising thing about *The Janus Report on Human Sexuality* (John Wiley & Sons) is that its findings don't really surprise. I had hoped to come across some Kinsey-like revelations as to how huge percentages of Americans are pursuing new and innovative perversions. Alas, there are no such revelations and innovations. Instead there are painfully detailed quantifications that only tend to confirm rather than challenge familiar perceptions of the state of American sexual practices.

The authors, Samuel S. Janus, a psychologist, and Cynthia L. Janus, an M.D. (OB/GYN), deliver equally predictable analyses between tables. They offer obligatory praise for our new sexual awareness and the hope that anxiety, guilt, and tension will dissipate in the light of our new openness. Words like "wrong" and "guilt" appear safely in quotation marks to reassure the reader that their power over him has been dispelled by scientific fiat. The comforting message throughout is that no matter what one does or believes with respect to sex, there is a demographic subcategory ready to welcome him as a member.

Reading the *Janus Report*, I was reminded of a fellow I once knew, a man we called Large Bob. Large Bob had the peculiar habit of excusing his frequent fits of gluttony, lust, or sloth with remarks invariably prefaced with, "Well, I'm just the kinda guy who. . . ." When he took three extra desserts in the employee cafeteria he was the Kinda-Guy-Who-Just-Likes-His-Dessert. When he goofed off during work he was the Kinda-Guy-Who-Needs-A-Break-Now-And-Then. In sexual matters, when he leered at female passersby he was sometimes simply a "leg-man" or more often the Kinda-Guy-Who (indulges in particular practices).

Large Bob's method of moral analysis consisted of three steps. First, he would infer that every impulse, drive, or desire was the product of his very nature. Second, he would perform the inductive step of inferring the existence of a whole class of beings who shared his current state of craving. Third and last, he would conclude that self-denial at the moment in question would be both an injurious betrayal of his nature and a breach of a higher duty to his entire genus. In tone and substance, the *Janus Report* is for all those who are looking for "Kinda-Guy-Who" support for their sexual attitudes and practices.

Even if the reader is the kinda-guy-who is inclined to believe in the validity of sexual surveys, the dust jacket on the *Janus Report* initially engenders distrust. The cover bears the ominous caption "The first broadscale scientific national survey since Kinsey." For this reader (and others of my genus) the reference to Kinsey immediately conjures up images of a survey of prison inmates or former guests from the Phil Donahue Show. The reader thus opens the book unsure as to whether this book has any scientific validity whatsoever. Thus you can imagine the reader's relief when the preface is immediately followed by a page titled "Panel of Experts," with their names and titles enumerated.

Over four thousand Americans participated in the *Janus* survey, each answering 105 questions. To their credit, the authors clearly put forth a considerable effort to give this study a firm statistical footing. This is no Cosmo survey. If there is a distortion in the numbers, it is probably largely a function of the fact that those who agree to participate in a sexual survey probably have different attitudes from those who refuse to participate. This factor may help to explain the reported sharp rise of sexual activity within the Postmature category, those sixty-five years and older (a number of "postmature" citizens of my acquaintance, for instance, would likely decline to participate even before getting to the questions on necrophilia and sadomasochism). It may also explain why the sample population turned out to be slightly more urban and upscale than the nation as a whole. Nevertheless, even with this underlying bias the numbers generally tend to paint a believable portrait of American sexual attitudes, even if skewed a few points on the side of greater sexual activism.

There are chapters devoted to sexual topics related to age, money, politics, and even geography. For example, there are data to indicate that persons living on the west coast or in the northeast are more likely than midwesterners and southerners to have had extramarital affairs, to have had an abortion, or to have had sex with sixty-one or more persons, and they are also less likely to find one-night stands degrading. (This is, of course, consistent with what everybody already knows about New Yorkers and Californians.) However, the good news for southern men is that 59 percent of southern women report themselves to have become more sexually active over the last three years as opposed to only a 28 percent rise among women on the west coast.

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The education section reports the rather bizarre finding that 14 percent of all men who have never been to college have had more than 101 partners. Even though I spent three years in the Army listening to barracks braggadocio, I find that hard to believe. A reported 37 percent of women who have attended college but did not graduate have had eleven to thirty sex partners. However, a full 52 percent of those who stayed the full four years achieve that status. Therefore, statistically speaking, typical parents can expect that for each $15,000 they shell out for a year of college tuition and board, they can expect to add 2.5 to 5 partners to their daughter's sexual resumé. This, too, is consistent with popular perceptions.

The data on education and sex also indicate that the overall effect of higher education is to move persons into the middle range (eleven to thirty partners) of promiscuity, whereas persons with only a high school education are somewhat more likely to be at the extremes (zero or 101+). Oddly enough, the rate of women reporting more than 100 partners declines from 4 percent among the high school graduates to one percent among college graduates but increases to 8 percent among postgraduate women. The study implies that for women senior year and grad school are rather busy times. In contrast, the postgraduate men don't appear to be keeping pace with their female counterparts.

As engrossing as the reader may find other chapters, the most interesting chapter is entitled "Religion and Sex." After an introduction consisting of an obligatory celebration of our emergence from those dark times in which religion adversely affected our sex lives, there are thirty-eight tables on sexual attitudes broken out by religious category. Some tables are broken out by the conventional Protestant, Catholic, Jew, and None. But most are categorized by the more curious Very Religious, Religious, Slightly Religious, and Not Religious categories.

I admit that this item was a real stumper for me when I filled out the sample questionnaire in the back of the book. Should I check "Very Religious" to indicate the strength of my intellectual convictions or "Slightly Religious" to more accurately reflect my actual practice? I selected "Religious" as a compromise.

From the responses, it seems that some of the participants in the survey may have had equal difficulty categorizing themselves by strength of religious conviction. For example, 14 percent of the "Very Religious" report that they "Often" have extramarital affairs (as opposed to Never, Only Once, or Rarely) and 12 percent responded that it is "Unimportant" or "Very Unimportant" that their sex practice be in harmony with their religion. Unless this segment of the "Very Religious" are worshippers of Baal, I find these responses difficult to understand. Even more difficult to fathom is why 11 percent of the "Not Religious" believe that it is important that their sexual practices be consistent with their religious beliefs.

Fifty-five percent of the "Very Religious" regarded themselves as sexually "Active" or "Very Active," a figure virtually identical to the 54 percent turned in by both the "Slightly Religious" and the "Not Religious." The merely "Religious" had a comparatively poorer showing at 45 percent, indicating that self-conscious lukewarmness in matters of faith may carry over into one's sex life.

Catholics (64 percent) and Jews (62 percent) find sex "Deliciously Sensuous" (a carefully chosen scientific term of art, no doubt) as opposed to only 51 percent of Protestants, perhaps indicating that a vestigial sense of guilt is more likely to enhance sexual excitement than a vestigial sense of moderation. By a 44 percent to 27 percent margin, Catholics report more rather than less sexual activity over the last three years, similar to the Protestant margin of 41 percent to 29 percent, whereas Jews turned in a more ambivalent figure of 39 percent to 35 percent. Surprisingly, the "None" category reported *less* sexual activity by a 35 percent to 30 percent margin.

Unfortunately, there is insufficient data to account for the sexual decline of the "None." Perhaps these are persons whose faith was lost and sexual energies spent during the Age of Aquarius. Or perhaps there is a peculiar new sexual reticence among the purely secular worthy of further study. I am reminded of accounts of sexual boredom and rapidly declining birth rates among secularized Soviet citizens, whereas the thriving Muslim populations in the southern USSR spoke openly of their inexorable "victory in the bedroom."

The "None" and "Not Religious" categories report higher rates of sexual fantasizing, more extramarital affairs, a reliance on a "large variety of sexual techniques," a slightly lower sense of sexual enjoyment, and a lower self-perception with respect to functioning at a sexual "biological maximum." By a 59 percent to 44 percent margin, the "Very Religious" see themselves at a biological maximum as compared to the "Not Religious."

In the summation of the "Sex and Religion" chapter, the Drs. Janus opine that "many religious people have some difficulty enjoying their sex lives." However, the data preceding this observation seem to indicate that, on the contrary, "religious people" are generally having a great time as compared to their more secular brethren. In contrast the None/Not Religious do not come across as a happier group.

The authors appear oblivious to the demonstrable behavioral effects of culturally inspired capacities for healthy levels of hypocrisy and a sense of *joi de vivre* clearly lacking in the "None/Not Religious." (These "None" guys need to meet some Very Religious Catholic Postgraduate Women presently residing in

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southern states.)

The religion and sex chapter ended with the chipper conclusion that these are indeed happy sexual times because "one no longer has to make a choice between pleasure and faith." While that assertion may be theologically absurd, historically ignorant, and psychologically shallow, the authors do have the data to show that the kinda-guy-who believes such drivel may indeed be a large genus. However, my suspicion is that the Kinda-Guy-Who-Knows-Better-But-Occasionally-Does-It-Anyway is, and ever shall be, the largest genus of all. We did not need the *Janus Report* to tell us that.

GEORGE A. TOBIN, *a frequent contributor to* FIRST THINGS, *practices law in Washington, D.C.*

Human Rights in Vienna

James Finn

One can learn from unfortunate experiences. This truism applies in spades to the World Conference on Human Rights sponsored by the UN and held in Vienna in late June. Unhappily, there is no corresponding truism that guarantees the learning experience will occur. One can only hope that in this case the United States government will prove an apt pupil.

The initiating impulse behind the conference was clear. The last global human rights conference was held in Tehran twenty-five years ago. Since then the international political order has undergone a seismic shift. In recent years the Cold War has ended, a "new world order" with a distinct swing toward democracy has begun to emerge, and human rights has assumed ever greater importance on the international scene. It seemed an apposite time for the UN and its member states to review the entire human rights agenda, both its basic principles and the means available to monitor violations of those principles. In spite of the pitfalls and potholes seemingly endemic to UN deliberations, the conference presented genuine opportunities for the participating countries to advance the human rights agenda.

When the initial proposal for the conference was made in 1989, the General Assembly suggested that member states and human rights nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) hold regional meetings in preparation for the world gathering. Many did. Representatives of African states held a preparatory conference in Tunis in November 1992, the Latin and Caribbean countries did the same in San Jose in January 1993, and countries from Asia and the Pacific followed suit in Bangkok in March-April 1993. Each of these groups issued a collective statement of its views in declarations named after the cities in which they met. Each of these declarations gave clear indications of the regional goals and aspirations, often antidemocratic and otherwise unpalatable to Western values, that would be pursued at the conference. The United States and its Western allies held no regional meeting and produced no coordinated statement of principles and objectives. Only at the fourth and final preparatory meeting held in Geneva (April-May 1993) did the United States present a draft plan.

Drawing heavily on the documents of the preparatory committees, Ibrahim Fall, Secretary General of the conference, produced a working document that would form the basis for the Vienna meeting. His best efforts to find consensus among the participating countries and to finesse conflicting views in ambiguous language could not bridge profound differences. The forty-eight page draft enclosed within brackets, therefore, all passages disputed by any government. Over 200 sets of brackets peppered this document. At times during the often harsh debates over these passages it seemed that the discussions and the conference itself might simply collapse without agreement. That outcome apparently was deemed even less acceptable than a less than acceptable agreement. When the sessions finally ended, therefore, the delegates were able to congratulate themselves on producing for unanimous approval the Final Declaration and Action Program of the World Conference on Human Rights. This Vienna Declaration, as it is also called, is a grievously flawed document that compares unfavorably not only with the U.S. Bill of Rights but with the UN's own Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948. It skates lightly over such basic rights as freedom of religion, freedom of speech, and freedom of association, even as it emphasizes an array of alleged economic freedoms.

Not surprisingly, the debates at the Vienna conference reflected the real political world outside its narrow circumference. They helped clarify why the short-lived euphoria that followed the liberation of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Empire from communism was in fact short-lived. Yes, the Cold War has passed into history, but its legacy lingers on. (One of the ironic events of the conference was the rude verbal assault launched by a group of Latin American radicals against Jimmy Carter, the former "human rights President," to prevent him from speaking. They were protesting, they explained, the prominent position given to the leader of one of the world's worst violators of human rights. The irony was compounded when Carter subsequently asserted that a starving family will have no interest in freedom of speech,

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thereby adopting one of the most egregious apologies for the tyrannical violation of human rights.)

A number of regimes continue to locate the cause of their countries' poverty not in their own political, economic, and cultural systems but in those of the successful, productive countries. Countries that are largely industrial, capitalist, and democratic remain the target of choice. In Vienna, delegates from dictatorial countries proposed to rectify the "deplorable gap" between rich and poor countries by massive transfers of wealth, without conditions, of course, on the recipients.

As for the "new world order," it became ever clearer in Vienna that there is less order than bafflement in the new political world. Regrettably, one must add that the United States participates in and contributes to that bafflement. Its performance on the world scene was all too faithfully reflected at the conference.

The failure of the United States and its allies to perform adequately in Vienna was, it is fair to say, no accident. It flowed naturally from a lack of foresight, clearly designated goals, and political leadership. At the conference itself, it was the unhappy task of the U.S. delegation to engage in damage control. It was too late to infuse the Vienna Declaration with political vision—even had such vision been available. It is to the credit of John Shattuck, U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Humanitarian Affairs, that even as he voted to accept the Declaration, he strongly criticized three separate sections. But that strong reservation was at the same time an acknowledgment that on these items the U.S. had been outmaneuvered and outvoted.

But it was on the very concept (or concepts) of human rights that most debate foundered. The Bangkok Declaration boldly attempted to deny the universality of human rights, to relativize them in terms of "national and regional particularities and various historical, religious, and cultural backgrounds." A number of dictatorial countries—including some that Freedom House has ranked among the worst violators of human rights—flatly asserted that individual rights must remain subservient to those of the state, a stipulation that, if accepted, would effectively strip the individual citizen of his rights. In his good opening statement, United States Secretary of State Warren Christopher spiked these notions. In a very quotable—and already much-quoted—statement, Christopher asserted that "we cannot let cultural relativism become the last refuge of repression." We can expect, however, that this argument, like an evil phoenix, will rise again in future debates.

The growth, indeed explosion, of interest in human rights in the last couple of decades has not been an unmixed blessing. The Helsinki process fostered the growth of human rights organizations, first in Eastern Europe and then in countries around the world. It challenged tyrannies and unleashed forces supporting democracy and civil society. The presence of hundreds of NGOs devoted to human rights, often critical of practices of their own governments, was everywhere evident in Vienna. Well, almost everywhere. The drafting committee in charge of preparing the final document prevented NGOs from attending their meetings even as observers. (In an arrangement richly symbolic of the measure of respect given to NGOs, they were allocated working space on the lower level of the vast Vienna International Center, while the official country delegates conducted business over their heads on the floors above.) The concern, energy, and increasing professionalism of many of these NGOs, including many newer ones from Asia, guarantees that in the future they will have a louder voice and more visible presence in their own countries and in international debate. All to the good.

The explosion of interest has also led, however, to an explosion of what allegedly constitutes a human right. Vienna depressingly confirmed that almost every major political or cultural issue, from AIDS to xenophobia, can now be judged to have a human rights component. This trend was evident years ago when the UN International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights ticked off as rights a list of what would more accurately be described as human aspirations and desires. Even then it seemed ludicrous to imagine that among our inalienable rights are life, liberty, and a paid vacation.

To the present laundry list of human rights, some participants wished to add a country's "universal and inalienable right to development." When to this is added the stipulation that no condition—such as the proper observance of human rights—should be attached to development aid, the stage is set for countries with faulty political and economic systems to demand, in the name of human rights, that economically successful countries bail them out.

The conference is over, and the Vienna Declaration remains as its defective fruit. Time now for reflection and plans for the future.

The issue of human rights is going to remain on the international scene, and the UN will remain a major arena in which differing concepts of those rights will be contested. If the U.S. or any of its agencies decides to engage in that arena it should do so seriously. If it does not, it will be outplayed by those who truly differ on questions of human rights or who cynically manipulate them. (It may be apropos to note here that advocates for Women's Rights scored one of the few clear victories at the Vienna Conference. They were well-organized internationally, very well-prepared, and ensured that their views were incorporated into every appropiate draft statement. As a consequence, the Vienna Declaration bears their unmistakable stamp.) To engage seriously is to have a clear concept of what constitutes human rights,

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what is their priority, and what are the means to ensure them. It is to assert the strong relation between democracy and the observance of human rights and to make the case for the contribution of democracies to international stability and well-being. On the basis of Vienna it is not clear that the strongest country in the world is as yet prepared to do these necessary things.

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Ann

Shuffling through your city of perpetual night, you
have come to this Advent eucharist with the help
of a seeing-eye dog. You clutch tight

the pew back curl of wood expecting neither
miracle nor accident to set the sight on fire.
I watch you stare as from a cliff ledge, groping

for the cinnamon coat of the Labrador
curled beside your kneeler. The blue fire
of the sun lies pooled in its eyes. Awakened suddenly

to the impoliteness of my stare, I turn my gaze
to candle's flickering, a small crucifix

hung on a nail. I, too, have been led here
to the ruby light, though not by earthly Hound.

Climbing the narrow stair I have come, again,
in the hopes of even ground. Together we wait
for a cosmic burning to haul the eyelids up. I try

to imagine what it might be like for you, the absence
of light as large and pure as God, whether the Sanctus
and Agnus Dei fall like swords from pipes invisible.

And yet, when the priest raises the chalice
to your lips, it is clear the wine is a flame
holding up the sky, sustaining our night.

William North

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The Languages of the Rights of Man

Philippe Bénéton

Those who once spoke, or who speak, the language of the rights of man make up a most varied group: Jefferson and Mounier, Robespierre and Saint Just; Roosevelt but also Vyshinsky; John Paul II and Ronald Dworkin. Which is to say, this language has been used in a whole assortment of ways. Thus if the notion of the rights of man has become the hallmark of modern ethical theory and liberal politics, it is nevertheless a confused notion. There were, there are, different languages of the rights of man, and these languages must first of all be distinguished one from the another.

To begin with, the rights of man were officially consecrated by the Americans and the French at the end of the eighteenth century. These rights, which did in fact open the era of modern politics, nevertheless remain difficult to interpret. Jacques Maritain, for example, or John Finnis see in them a progress in recognition and understanding of the natural law—modern rights prolonging classical natural law. Others, men like Leo Strauss or Ernest Fortin, claim that these modern natural rights represent a fundamental rupture with the tradition of classical natural law.

The difficulty here is clearly related to the equivocal, or downright indeterminate, use of terms. The eighteenth-century texts declare that men are endowed with equal rights and an equal right to liberty. In France, this formulation did, to be sure, sound the deathknell of the ancien régime, but the question remains of how to interpret such a formulation from the perspective of the history of natural right. In schematic terms, one can sketch two competing interpretations.

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In the first view, this formulation of equality marks a progress in bringing to light the natural order. From antiquity down to the modern era, all societies were in fact governed by the principle of aristocracy, by which some have by nature—that is to say, from birth—the right to command others (ancient "democracy" was itself qualified in this way). The recognition against this aristocratic principle of an original and fundamental equality among men lies within the dynamics of Christian equality; it is inseparable from evangelical ferment.

The second interpretation, however, states that the modern idea of rights represents a genuine rupture with Christianity, because modern equality is not the same as Christian equality. According to the Christian idea of equality, men have in common the same filiation and the same vocation; according to the modern version of equality, that which men have in common is the right to pursue different ends, to have nothing in common except this right. The equality of sovereign individuals is not the equality of children of God.

So which interpretation should be adopted? Such questions are of course complicated; each way of looking at the interpretation of equality undoubtedly contains its own part of the truth. And because of the various influences that came together in the composition of both the French and the American declarations, we can see simultaneously the effects of a Christian context and of non-Christian and even anti-Christian ideas. It is also the case that the authors of these texts did not themselves always mean the same things by the same formulation: the declarations were no less ambiguous at the time of their composition than they are today.

Nevertheless, it seems correct to say that the dominant note was that of rupture. Historically, the birth of the "rights of man" is tied to a transformation of the conception of politics: classical politics had at-

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tached itself to the promotion of the *rules of life,* whereas modern politics in its liberal version limits itself to establishing the *rules of the game.* For classical natural law (from Aristotle to Saint Thomas), man is animated by a vocation and politics has for its end the accomplishment of that human vocation. Politics is at the service of the good life, of the *bona vita multitudinis.* In this perspective, classical natural law insists, above all, on the duties of man.

What characterizes modern political thought is the rejection of the *bona vita* as a guide to political action. Men either lack such a thing as a natural vocation or at least they disagree about what such a vocation consists in. This makes it necessary to rethink politics, to begin with men as they are and to arrange things in order that those who are divided about the issue of what constitutes the good life will nevertheless live together in peace.

The work of modern thought, pioneered by Machiavelli, followed by Hobbes and followed still further by Locke, results in the liberal, that is, a procedural, solution: the duties of man are effaced in favor of their rights; the rules of life, in favor of the rules of the game—rules that must allow men who differ to pursue their own individual interests, each in his own way. The rights of man are a key part of the modern liberal promise: that each man be guaranteed individual liberty, civil peace, and comfort.

To begin with, the liberal solution was a moderate, a temperate, one. In fact, for Locke or for the French liberals or for the American founders, the objective was clearly the establishment of a new political order on the basis of the rights of the individual and the free pursuit of his interest; nevertheless, for these thinkers it was obvious that such principles would be limited by such moderating influences as family, education, and religion (illustrations of this recognition can be found in Locke's *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* or in Washington's *Farewell Address*). The *bona vita* was to be excluded from politics, but there remained traditional rules about how to live properly, and with honor. Equal liberty was to exist within certain limits originally laid down by Christian morality.

But the liberal forefathers had not been conscious of the fact that they were creating a time-bomb. To begin with the individual and his rights, renouncing the idea of a human vocation, is to set in motion a process that leads to the limitless sovereignty of the individual, unbound by ties to nature and natural morality. In other words, Christian thought had been saying: "These are your duties and God help you," and by now contemporary thought is saying: "These are your rights and the devil take care of you" (*que le diable t'emporte*).

This evolution was, of course, not a straightforward development from one point to another. Thus the French Revolution proclaimed the rights of man but almost from the beginning did not respect its own universalist principles. In June 1793—to take only one example—after their victory over the Girondins, the Jacobins wrote a new Declaration of Rights in which, at the very moment they were engaged in a systematic campaign of terror, they reaffirmed the principles of individual liberty and the right to resist oppression. It would, however, be wrong to see this as some kind of contradiction between discourse and practice. There was no contradiction because in Jacobin usage the term the "rights of man" had simply come to signify something else. The French Revolution had from the start put forward two distinct sets of principles, the universalist principles and the ideological ones. And almost immediately, the latter subverted the former. Whether in 1789 or in 1793, the *patriotes* were saying two different things at the same time: first, that all men are free and equal, and sovereignty belongs to the *Nation* or to the *Peuple*; and second, that there are two types of men, Good ones and Bad ones, the Good ones being the *Peuple* or the *amis de la liberté,* the Bad ones being the *ennemis du Peuple* or the *contre-revolutionnaires.* In other words, "liberty for all" but "no liberty for the enemies of liberty." "We are brothers," but, as Chamfort once ironically put it, "Be my brother or I will kill you." Robespierre's famous formula of the "despotism of liberty" against tyranny would be a contradiction in terms if in his mouth liberty was not once and for all incarnated in a given ideological camp—the camp of liberty enjoying the complete liberty to suppress the liberty of those who do not agree. The ideology says that politics is war between two camps, that of the good and that of the wicked. Good and Evil are no longer matters of degree, but are attached to the essence of beings, on one side the *patriotes,* the *peuple*—on the other the *ennemis du peuple,* the *suppôts du despotisme.* And by this Manichean dualism the rights of man are subverted.

The same logic was at work in the politics of V. I. Lenin. For Lenin, social life had to be understood entirely in terms of the "class struggle," that radical and irremediable battle pitting the "bourgeoisie" against the "proletariat." There is no third party, no intermediate situation, and no universalist perspective. Liberty, asked Lenin, means liberty for whom—that of the oppressors or that of the oppressed? Justice is justice for whom? etc. Liberty, equality, and justice are transformed and denatured by the one true perspective, the perspective of class.

There is not, then, as many for a long time have sought to suggest, an ideological version of the rights of man—a Jacobin version, a Leninist version—that competes with interpretation of the liberal version. There is a liberal version of the rights of man and an ideological *sub*version of the rights of man.

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Leaving aside those dramatic periods of ideological domination, what was going on in the West with respect to the rights of man? Actually, we can distinguish two lines of evolution, one in which the modern liberal promise has been kept, and one in which the logic of that promise has accelerated out of control—or, in other words, in which the time-bomb has exploded.

The liberal promise has surely been kept: men have won civil peace, public liberties, and comfort. Life has become safer, life has become softer. This promise was to be sure not a Christian one—"For what does it profit a man if he gains the whole world and suffers the loss of his soul?" (Matthew 16:26) Nevertheless, there is of course a good side to this modern success: scientific and economic progress have permitted the great majority of men to accede to the material sufficiency that St. Thomas said is a precondition for virtue. In many ways technological progress has been useful for everyone; even the most conservative of the conservatives are not reluctant to use the airplane, listen to classical records, or seek the comfort of aspirin. In the political domain, too, the liberal West is able to boast of real success. The conduct of domestic politics is no longer a dangerous business—no one risks his life in it. The rights of man have played and still play a significant role in domesticating political power. And liberal democracy has granted to those who do not like such democracy the liberty of saying what they think.

But there is another side to the story. In seeking what Hobbes called the "delightful life" rather than the good life or the *bona vita,* in carrying the idea of individual rights to its extreme, the Western societies have tended to be subverted by their own principles. The rights of man were born in a world shaped by Christianity and even if they became detached from Christian doctrine, for a long time the root connections were not broken. The tempest of the sixties has changed all that; everything was swept up in its force. The idea of the sovereignty of the individual along with the principles of liberty and equality were, and have remained, completely radicalized. In *Le Cid* of Corneille, Rodigue says to Chimène in a perfect Alexandrine: *"j'ai fait ce que j'ai dû, je fais ce que je dois"* ("I did what I should, I do what I must"). Contemporary man says: "I do what I want, no one is better than I," or, more precisely: "Each of us is sovereign, each is equal to everyone else; I live as I want and my way of life is equal to everyone else's."

The contemporary language of human rights effaces natural distinctions—between the sexes, the ages, gifts, and capacities—and rejects all moral authority and all hierarchy concerning the way to live. "The great problem for man," said Jacques Maritain, "is that of finding oneself a master." The contemporary mind replies: "To find oneself a master is to break with equality, with the sovereignty of the individual; each must be self-sufficient." The world of today is a world where the language of moral authority ("You should") tends to efface itself. It is impolite to say, "You should"; it is necessary to say, "I prefer." Or to put it another way, it is bad to defend the idea of the good.

This evolution has had the effect of emptying the notion of the universality of the rights of man of all meaning. Men are all similar but they no longer have anything in common, except this equal liberty devoid of all substance. They have nothing in common except the right to have nothing in common.

Modern equality, then, is not a *substantial* equality but only a *formal* one. The first is grounded in the recognition of what is human, the second is founded on the claim that nothing is specifically human. In the first case, another person is equal to me because we share something that distinguishes us as human beings. In the case of merely formal equality, another person is equal to me because he cannot be more human, i.e., better than I. This latter view of equality reduces the universality of rights to simple issues of procedure. Rights, that is, lose all ties with nature and hence their very foundation. How can anyone speak of what constitutes the dignity of man when there are no criteria for distinguishing dignified from undignified conduct? How can we speak of the rights of man when we no longer know what man is?

The kind of formal equality that prevails today transforms the nature of the relationships among men. As Tocqueville pointed out, the modern sentiment of equality separates men from one another: because each man is his own master, any inequalities become purely contractual and functional and do not extend to anyone's way of living. No one is responsible for anyone else; the true idea of education is undermined; and relationships become functional, abstract, and cold. The contemporary idea of equality is not mutual recognition; it is much more a matter of self-affirmation and mutual indifference. And each man is invited to live just this way, so each man wants to be his own master precisely in order to do as everyone else does. The consequence is that modern man is an isolated being; he is a traveler without a compass, the "sovereign of his own misfortune," as Lammenais said.

As we know, the language of the rights of man was born outside the Roman Church and to some extent in opposition to it; and for a long time this language remained foreign to the Church's discourse. Things have changed since the early 1940s. Pius XII and his successors—most particularly John Paul II—have to some extent embraced the rights of man in order to insert them into Christian doctrine. Not that the change has been substantial: the magisterium continues to condemn philosophical liberalism, and its version of the rights of man does not imply any surrender to modern principles insofar as they are incompatible with Christianity. The con-

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trast between the discourse of John Paul II and the dominant discourse of our day, namely, that of extreme liberalism, is particularly blatant. In schematic terms, this contrast can be expressed as follows: the discourse of John Paul II attaches itself to the condition of the good life, whereas extreme liberalism entails the temptation to live badly; the former defines, in addition to formal rights, some substantial rights linked to the human vocation, while the latter limits itself to formal rights devoid of all idea of the *bona vita* and extends them to more deviant behavior. The first discourse reattaches the rights of man to the rights of God, and the second makes man instead a petty divinity. The rights of man in their Christian version are good because they are at the service of the Good; the rights of man in their contemporary radical version are good because they are *not* at the service of the Good (in this understanding it is bad to consecrate the Good because each is the measure of his own good).

The Pope expressed these concerns with particular clarity in a 1991 address to a meeting of European Christian Democrats:

> In fact there exists a temptation today to establish democracy as a moral relativism which goes so far as to reject all certitude about the meaning of human life and dignity, about human rights and fundamental human duties. When this sort of mentality takes hold, sooner or later democracies undergo a moral crisis. Relativism impedes the exercise of the necessary discernment between various demands which are expressed at the root of society: between good and evil. A society's life depends on decisions which must presuppose a firm moral conviction. When there is no more trust in the very value of the human person, one loses sight of what motivates the nobility of democracy; it is there ready to give way to various forms of corruption and manipulation of its institutions.

The discourse of extreme liberalism, then, is very misleading. In order to avoid being trapped by it, one must as a first step embrace the two following ideas on the basis of the natural law:

First, no formal right is an absolute. "Liberty is indivisible, unconditional," says the modern mind. But must one truly allow men to drug themselves, to make chemical weapons in their kitchens, to appeal to racial hatred, to distribute cocaine in the elementary schools? "Equality is universally valuable," the dominant language implies. But it is after all necessary to see both sides of this question. On the one hand, men are equal above all because they all share the same nature and the same condition, i.e., for reasons that give substance to equality. On the other hand, they are obviously unequal in a multiplicity of ways. They are at the same time fundamentally equal and powerfully unequal. It is necessary to preserve both the sense of equality and, when it touches on the question of what constitutes human excellence, the perception of inequality. In a sense, Pascal is not the equal of Bouvard and Pecuchet (the embodiments of human silliness in Flaubert's novel), nor is Madame de Merteuil (the heroine of *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*) the equal of Mother Teresa.

Second, formal rights are to be subordinated to a sober view of the human vocation. This human vocation is of course a matter of dispute, but natural reason—the *inclinatio naturalis* of St. Thomas—permits us to draw some lines. It is not a question of imposing the *bona vita* by constraint—virtue presupposes liberty to choose virtue—it is a question of limiting and containing the propaganda of the *mala vita* (for example, pornography). The only solution is to grope for a point of equilibrium between liberty and virtue. Indeed, formal rights correctly understood (that is, between limits established by respect for the dignity and the vocation of men) have their own value. This value is obvious when the rights of man are opposed to a tyrannical power. They translate what is the great success of liberal modern regimes: the domestication of the Minotaur.

To the question, "What does the economy economize?", Sir Dennis H. Robertson once made the lapidary response, "love." The market economy does not need love to work well. To the question, "What do the rights of man, in the contemporary version, economize?", the response is equally, "love." A society based on the formal rights of man does not need love.

The present epoch is one characterized by a procedural rationalization of a world where the divorce between law and nature, reason and life, knowledge and faith, society and friendship, is clearly manifest. Modern society is made for men who do not love each other. But what happens to a society without a sense of community? Besides, even if society does not need love, men, in fact, do. FT

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No Other Gods

Robert L. Wilken

One of the lessons read at the Easter vigil is the story of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fiery furnace. It is a good story, told well and not without irony. Each year when it is read I can hardly conceal a smile as the author lists (and not just once) the titles of the king's advisors—the satraps, prefects, governors, counselors, treasurers, justices, magistrates, and officials of the provinces—or as he takes delight (again not just once) in naming the musical instruments that called people to worship the golden statue—the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and the entire musical ensemble. This year, however, it was another section of the lesson that caught my attention. After the deliverance of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego from the fiery furnace, King Nebuchadnezzar says, "Blessed be the God of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. . . . They disobeyed the king's command and yielded up their bodies rather than serve and worship any god except their own God." (Daniel 3:28)

It is a sign of the times that on the holiest night of the year the phrase from Daniel, "serve and worship any god except their own God," leaped out at me. In the past I remember listening intently as Genesis 1, the account of the Passover, or the exhortations of Deuteronomy were read to the newly baptized. But this Easter the words of King Nebuchadnezzar brought to mind the First Commandment: You shall have no other gods besides me. In the waning years of the twentieth century the time has come for Christians to bear witness to the worship of the one true God.

Practical atheism, that is to say, secularism, has undermined beliefs, attitudes, and conventions that have nurtured our civilization for centuries. The changes we are witnessing are not the inevitable alterations by which older ways adapt to new circumstances. They are the result of a systematic dismembering, a "trashing" of our culture that is "intentional, not accidental," as Myron Magnet puts it in his recent *The Dream and the Nightmare*. Nothing is left untouched, whether it be our most cherished institutions, or the roles that have defined one's place in family, neighborhood, and city, or assumptions about duty, love, virtue, honor, and modesty. All are subject to the scalpel of impatient and haughty reformers; what has been received from our parents and grandparents and from their parents and grandparents must submit to our unforgiving formulas for correction.

The goal, of course, is to dismantle the common Western culture, to turn everything into a subculture. Secularism wants religious practice, especially Christian practice, banished to a private world of feelings and attitudes, while at the same time the realm of the public is to be expanded to include every aspect of one's life. The earlier secularist appearance of tolerance toward religion is now seen to have been a sham.

Nor does secularism sustain any sense of obligation to the past. The texture of memory that is essential to a common culture cannot be sustained if the past is not lovingly transmitted to those who come after—even should some of its monuments offend us.

Christianity has proved to be more tolerant than the current revisionists. As the French philosopher Rémi Brague observed in these pages ("Christ, Culture & the New Europe," August/September 1992), Christian culture "resisted the temptation to absorb in itself what it had inherited from either the Greeks or the Jews—to suck in the content and to throw away the empty husk." Over its long history the Christian tradition has cultivated a studied openness to the wisdom of former ages, even when such wisdom provided intellectual resources with which to challenge Christian faith. Think how the *philosophes* in their

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attacks on Christianity depended upon their legacy from antiquity. Yet for centuries, Christian institutions have nurtured the study of the classics. Christianity is an essential ingredient in our culture, says Brague, for its form "enables it to remain open to whatever can come from the outside and enrich the hoard of its experiences with the human and divine."

The ferocity of the current assault on the legacy of Christian culture, however, has brought a new clarity of vision. The alternatives are set before us with unusual starkness: either there will be a genuine renewal of Christian culture—there is no serious alternative—or we will be enveloped by the darkness of paganism in which the worship of the true God is abandoned and forgotten. The sources of the cultural crisis, it turns out, are theological.

In his lectures on *Christianity and Culture*, T. S. Eliot posed the issue of the relation between Christianity and Western culture in terms that were remarkably prescient. Writing in 1939 on the eve of the Second World War, Eliot said that the "choice before us is between the formation of a new Christian culture, and the acceptance of a pagan one." Distinguishing three epochs in the history of Christianity and Western culture, he spoke of the period when Christianity was a "minority in a society of positive pagan traditions," a second period when the society as a whole—law, education, literature, art, as well as religion—was formed by Christianity, and a third, our own period, in which the culture has become "mainly negative, but which, so far as it is positive, is still Christian." In his view, "a society has not ceased to be Christian until it has become something else." Yet, he continued, "I do not think that [a culture] can remain negative," and it is conceivable that there will be an attempt to build a new culture on wholly different "spiritual" foundations. Eliot's proposal is that the way to meet this challenge is to form a "new Christian culture."

His lectures are filled with much wisdom: for example, that "Christianity is communal before being individual," and that there can be no Christian society where there is no respect for the religious life. "I cannot," he says, "conceive a Christian society without religious orders, even purely contemplative orders, even enclosed orders." If we are to speak of a Christian society, we "must treat Christianity with a great deal more intellectual respect than is our wont. . . ." And we must be concerned to make clear "its difference from the kind of society in which we are now living." Above all there is his observation that touches more directly on theology: it is, he writes, a "very dangerous inversion" for Christian thinkers "to advocate Christianity, not because it is true, but because it might be beneficial." Instead of showing that "Christianity provides a foundation for morality," one must show "the necessity of Christian morality from the truth of Christianity." "It is not enthusiasm, but dogma, that differentiates a Christian from a pagan society."

Dogma and truth are not the kind of words that will pass the test of political correctness, yet—or perhaps therefore—they are most useful in helping us precisely to identify the distinctively theological task that lies before us. It is time to return to first principles, to the First Commandment, and to take up anew the challenge faced by Christians many centuries ago when the Christian movement was first making its way in the Roman Empire. Christians are now called to persuade others (including many within the churches) that our first duty as human beings is to honor and venerate the one true God, and that without the worship of God, society disintegrates into an amoral aggregate of competing, self-centered interests destructive of the commonweal. To meet that challenge, Christians must learn again to speak forthrightly about who we are and what we know of God.

The Christian faith, as Eliot reminds us, is concerned not simply with values or attitudes or feelings or even "beliefs" as we use the word today, but with truth. Christianity is based not simply on experience, tradition, inherited wisdom, and reason, but on God's self-disclosure in history. To be sure, Christian truth has been handed on through a learned tradition in which it has been formulated, criticized, analyzed, refined, and tested by experience. Thus it has been the bearer of wisdom about what is good in human life, about sexuality, about being young and growing old, about work and money, children and family, duty and sacrifice, about friendship and love, art, literature, and music. But, as Origen of Alexandria said in the third century in his response to charges brought against Christianity by its critics, the Christian religion has its origin in "God's manifestation not in human sagacity," in the appearance of the divine Logos in human form. Christian faith is grounded in what was made known in Christ and confirmed by the Spirit's witness in the church. Consequently, Christian thinking, whether about God, about Christ, about the moral life, or about culture, must always begin with what has been made known.

A pernicious feature of Christian discourse in our day is its tentativeness, the corrosive assumption that everything we teach and practice is to be subject to correction by appeals to putative evidence, whether from science, history, or the religious experience of others. Nicholas Wolterstorff and Alvin Plantinga call this the evidentialist fallacy, the claim that it is not rational for a person to be a Christian unless he "holds his religious convictions on the basis of other beliefs of his which give to those convictions adequate evidential support." In this view, one's religious beliefs are to be held "probable" until evidence is deployed from elsewhere to support and legitimate them. The "presumption of atheism" must be the

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starting point of all our thinking, even about God.

One way of responding to this line of thought has been to offer arguments for the existence of God based on what is considered evidence acceptable to any reasonable person. Conventional wisdom has had it that proof of the existence of God has to be established without reference to the specifics of Christianity (or Judaism) or to the experience of the church. Atheism is to be countered by a defense of theism, not of Christian revelation. But this strategy has failed. In his book *At the Origins of Modern Atheism*, Michael Buckley helps us to understand why. To defend the existence of God, Christian thinkers in early modern times excluded all appeals to Christian behavior or practices, the very things that give Christianity its power and have been its most compelling testimony to the reality of God. Arguments against atheism inevitably took the form of arguments from nature or design, i.e., philosophical arguments without reference to Christ, to the sacraments, to the practice of prayer, to the church. Buckley's book is an account of how this came to be, but within its historical description is to be found an argument that the "god defined in religion cannot be affirmed or supported adequately . . . without the unique reality that is religion." Or, to put the matter more concretely: "What god is, and even that god is, has its primordial evidence in the person and in the event that is Jesus Christ."

What has given Christianity its strength as a religion, as a way of life, and as an intellectual tradition is that it has always been confident of what it knows, and has insisted from the very beginning, again to cite Origen, that the "gospel has a proof which is peculiar to itself." This phrase occurs at the very beginning of the Origen's defense of Christianity to its cultural despisers, his *Contra Celsum*. Celsus, a Greek philosopher who lived in the second century, had said that the "teaching" that was the source of Christianity was "originally barbarian," which meant that Christianity had its origins in Judaism. Origen grants the point and even compliments Celsus that he does not reproach the gospel because it arose among non-Greeks. Yet Celsus adds a condition. He is willing to accept what Christians have received from barbarians as long as Christians are willing to subject their teaching to "Greek proof," i.e., to measure it by Celsus' standards as to what is reasonable. Celsus believes that "the Greeks are better able to judge the value of what the barbarians have discovered, and to establish the doctrines and put them into practice by virtue." This is presumptuous, says Origen, for it implies that the "truth of Christianity" is to be decided by a criterion external to itself; but, he continues, the "gospel has a *proof* which is *peculiar to itself* and which is more divine than a Greek proof based on dialectical arguments." This more "divine demonstration" St. Paul (1 Corinthians 2:4) calls "demonstration of the Spirit and of power."

Insisting that the gospel has a "proof peculiar to itself" did not mean that Christian thinking ignored the claims of reason, dismissing questions that arose from history or experience or logic. In discussions with Greeks, Christian thinkers presented the new faith not only by reference to the Scriptures but also by appeal to classical literature and general conceptions, "common ideas" that they shared with other educated men and women. Critics tried to brand the Christians as mere "fideists," but the charge rang hollow. From the beginning, Christians heeded the claims of reason, and it did not take long for their adversaries to learn that they were able to match them argument for argument. Pagan thinkers had no franchise on rationality. The existence of a serious dialogue between Christians and Greek and Roman philosophers, conducted at the highest intellectual level for over three centuries (the mid-second century to the mid-fifth), is evidence that Christian thinkers did not supplant reason by faith and authority. The assertion that the gospel had a "proof peculiar to itself" was not a confession of unreasoning faith but an argument that commended itself to thoughtful men and women.

At issue in the argument about reason was the question of its starting point. Origen argued that with the coming of Christ reason had to attend to something new in human experience. In the earliest period of the church's history Christian thinkers did not become philosophers in order to engage the philosophers. Or, to put the matter more accurately, to engage in philosophical discussion they did not assume a traditional philosophical starting point. In the philosophical texts of the time knowledge of God was derived through certain well-defined ways of knowing: by a process of successive abstractions—e.g., in the way one moves from a surface to a line and finally to a point in geometry; by analogy—i.e., by comparing the light of the sun and visible things with the light of God and intellectual things; or by contemplating physical objects and gradually moving to the contemplation of intellectual matters. Against the intellectualism of these ways of knowing God, Christian thinkers argued that the knowledge of God rested on "divine action" and on "God's appearance" among human beings in the person of Christ. Even when speaking to the outsider, they insisted that it was more reasonable to begin with the history of Jesus (and of Israel) than with abstract reasoning. Reason could no longer be exercised independently of what had taken place in history and what had come to be because of that history: the new reality of the church, a people devoted to the worship of the one true God.

How this conviction worked itself out in Christian thinking can be seen in the work of one writer after another, in Athanasius' response to the Arians, or Augustine's efforts to disentangle himself

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from the sophistries of the Manichees. But for our purposes here, Origen is the most illuminating because he stands at the beginning of the Christian intellectual tradition. He was the first truly deep thinker to give a firm epistemological foundation to the claim that Christians had come to know the true God in the person of Christ.

One of the most familiar citations of Plato in this period was a passage from the *Timaeus* in which Plato wrote, "It is difficult to discover the Father and Maker of this universe; and having found Him, it is impossible to declare Him to all." This text was understood to mean that God was beyond our comprehension, though by the activity of enlightened minds it was possible to have some knowledge of God. Celsus had cited this passage in his argument against the Christians. Origen, in responding to Celsus, said that while Plato's statement was "noble and impressive," it rested on philosophical agnosticism. The best evidence of its limitation was that on the basis of such knowledge of God the philosophers had changed neither their lives nor their manner of worship. Even while claiming to know the true God, they went on worshipping the many gods of Greece and Rome—and went on defending such piety as well. For Origen, as well as for Augustine and other critics of the religion of the philosophers, this is the central point. Because their knowledge of God was limited to what they could know by the activity of the mind, they never came to a genuine knowledge of God. They kept falling back into idolatry. Had Plato known the true God, writes Origen, he "would not have reverenced anything else and called it God and worshipped it, either abandoning the true God or combining with the majesty of God things which ought not to be associated with Him."

The philosophers would not acknowledge that by "becoming flesh" the divine Logos made it possible for human beings to know God more fully than they could by means of human reasoning alone. "We affirm," writes Origen, "that human nature is not sufficient in any way to seek for God and to find Him in his pure nature, unless it is helped by the God who is the object of the search." The knowledge of God is unlike other forms of knowledge. For it begins with God, not with human reasoning, and how we conceive of God is dependent on the nature of the reality that is presented to us—in the language of the Bible, that which is *seen*. The Church Fathers relied heavily on the Gospel of John in their "epistemology," and especially on John's conjunction between "seeing" and "knowing." One of the most frequently cited texts is John 1:18: "No one has ever *seen* God; the only Son, who is in the bosom of the Father, he has made him *known*."

One sign of the impoverishment of Christian speech in our day is that the term "faith" has been emptied of its cognitive dimension. As the Swiss Catholic theologian Hans Urs von Balthasar recognized, the logic of Christian discourse has collapsed at this point. "Nothing expresses more unequivocally the profound failure of [theologies that separate the Christ of faith and the Jesus of history] than their deeply anguished, joyless, and cheerless tone: torn between knowing and believing, they are no longer able to *see* anything, nor can they be convincing in any visible way." He cites the now-classic essay of the French Jesuit Pierre Rousselot, "The Eyes of Faith," published in 1910. The word "eyes," says von Balthasar, "indicates that there is something there for faith to see and, indeed, that Christian faith essentially consists in an ability to see what God chooses to show and which cannot be seen without faith."

The key point here is that faith is not a form of interpretation, one perspective among others, but a seeing of what there is to see, and hence a form of knowing. Recall the opening words of the First Epistle of John: "We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us. . . ." First John states the primal truth that Christian faith rests on witness to what has happened in history, hence the honored place of the *martyrs* (witnesses) in Christian memory. Yet the witness to what was "seen" is never a testimony simply of what has happened in the past. In his Commentary on 1 John, St. Augustine noted a curious feature of its opening words. John does not simply say that he is bearing witness to what he has seen and touched; he says that he is also bearing witness to the "Word of Life." It does not escape Augustine that the phrase "Word of Life" does not refer to the body of Christ which could be seen and handled. "The life itself has been manifested in flesh—that what can be seen by the heart alone might be seen also by the eyes for the healing of hearts. Only by the heart is the Word seen; flesh is seen by the bodily eyes. We had the means of seeing the flesh, but not of seeing the Word: the Word was made flesh which we could see, that the heart, by which we should see the Word, might be healed."

The testimony that the church bears from one generation to another is at once a seeing of what was seen and a seeing of what cannot be seen. It is a seeing of what was seen in that the testimony is about something that happened in space and time, something that could be seen with the eyes and touched with the hands, and which is part of events that preceded and followed; it is also a seeing of what cannot be seen, in John's terms, a "knowing," in that God who cannot be seen is revealed in the events. The testimony that 1 John brings is not simply a witness to an historical event, as one might, for example, tell others about a parade that passed in front of one's house. For that

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which one "saw" was the "Word of Life," not simply the words and actions of Jesus of Nazareth.

Faith is not something that is added to knowing: it is a constitutive part of the act of knowing God. Origen grasped this point with characteristic profundity. In his commentary on John 2:22—"After he was raised from the dead, his disciples remembered that he had said this; and they *believed* in the scripture and the word that Jesus had spoken"—Origen cites the words spoken to Thomas in chapter 20: "Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe." Then he asks: how could it be that those who have not seen and have believed are more blessed than those who have seen and believed? If that is the case, those who come after the apostles will be more blessed than the apostles. Origen's answer is that in this life faith is imperfect; only at the time of the Resurrection will it be complete. But faith will still be *necessary*. Without faith there is no knowledge of God. Hence it is possible to say of faith what Paul says of knowledge, "now we believe in part." When the "perfection of faith comes," that which is partial will disappear, "for faith complemented by vision is far superior to faith through a mirror."

Faith's certainty comes from participating in the reality that is believed—that is, through fellowship with God. "By faith," writes Augustine, "we see and we know. For if faith does not yet see, why are we called *illuminati*?" It is not possible to know God from a distance, to be a spectator. Commenting on John 8:19—"You know neither me nor my Father. If you knew me, you would know my Father also"—Origen explains how the term "know" is used in John and in the Bible as a whole. "One should take note," he says, "that the Scripture says that those who are united to something or participate in something are said to *know* that to which they are united or in which they participate. Before such union and fellowship, even if they understand the reasons given for something, they do not know it." As illustration he mentions the union between Adam and Eve which the Bible described as "Adam knew his wife Eve," and in 1 Corinthians 6:16-17, the union with a prostitute. This shows, he says, that "knowing" means "being joined to" or "united with." The knowledge of God, then, is experiential. No doubt this is one reason why the knowledge of God is always conjoined with the love of God in early Christian literature. Love implies familiarity, intimacy, union.

In terms such as these early Christian thinkers defended the worship of the one God. The boldness of the intellectuals as well as the courage of the martyrs (in some cases, e.g., Justin Martyr or Origen, they were the same persons) rested on the certainty that comes from "seeing." In a sermon on Acts 1, John Chrysostom said, referring to the phrase "witness of the Resurrection," that the apostles, who were witness of the Resurrection, did not say, "Angels said this to me, but we have *seen* it." That is the inescapable foundation of Christian belief in God.

Matthew Arnold once said: "The uppermost idea with Hellenism is to see things as they really are." That puts things succinctly—and backwards. Early Christian thinkers insisted that the Greeks did *not* see things as they are. They only saw what lay on the surface. Like the pathetic creatures in Plato's cave, they saw only shadows and images. For this reason, it was the Greeks who had to be corrected, not the Christians. And on this basis Christian thinkers mounted an offensive against the pretensions of their culture. By ignoring the true God, their contemporaries not only did not know whom to worship or how, they failed to see that everything else in society—morality, art, literature, politics—was skewed. Hence, the early Christians were unwilling to bend the knee when they heard the sound of the horn, pipe, lyre, trigon, harp, drum, and entire musical ensemble. Their task, however, unlike that of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, was intellectual. They not only made confession, they set out to persuade others that they could love God more ardently and cleave to God more fervently if they sought God alone without the succor of rites that do not purify the soul. In doing so, they laid the foundations for a new kind of society, one in which serving God faithfully was the highest duty.

Of course, it was easy for Christians to criticize pagan religion, with its many gods, its veneration of objects of wood and stone and gold, its divining and use of auguries and portent, and most of all, its practice of animal sacrifice. Even pagan thinkers were critical of the practices that defined religious devotion in the cities. Before the rise of Christianity, there was a well-established tradition of criticism of religion in the ancient world. Philosophical religion, however, was another matter entirely, for many things the philosophers taught were compatible with Christian theology. Augustine, it will be remembered, was helped in his move to the Catholic faith by reading the *libri Platonici*, which meant of course the books of the neo-Platonists, Porphyry and Plotinus. Yet Christian thinkers, including Augustine, were no less critical of the theological ideas of the philosophers than they were of the religious practices of their fellow citizens.

Although the philosophers had an intuition of the true God, in the view of Christian thinkers, they did not know how to serve God. In a mordant passage in the *City of God*, Augustine, chiding Porphyry for proclaiming his devotion to the God of the Hebrews while venerating lesser gods, cites the words from Exodus: "Anyone who sacrifices to other gods instead of to the Lord alone will be extirpated." Augustine's argument is that worship is to be offered only to God, for "God himself is the source of our bliss, . . . the goal of our striving."

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It has sometimes been argued that in the *City of God*, his apology *contra paganos*, Augustine made place for a neutral secular space that could accommodate paganism and promote a "coherence of wills" about things relevant to this mortal life. Here there could be a joining of hands of the city of God and the earthly city for the cultivation of the arts of civilization. But for Augustine, a neutral secular space could only be a society without God, subject to the *libido dominandi*, the lust for power. He was convinced that even in this fallen world there could be no genuine peace or justice unless a society were to honor the one supreme God. There can, he writes, be no association of men united by a common sense of right where there is no true justice, and there can be no justice where God is not honored. "When a man does not serve God, what amount of justice are we to suppose exists in his being?" Where a people has no regard for God, there can be no social bond, no common life, and no virtue. "Although the virtues are reckoned by some people to be genuine and honorable when they are related only to themselves and are sought for no other end, even then they are puffed up and proud, and so are to be accounted vices rather than virtues."

In the *City of God*, Augustine is an apologist neither for a secular public space nor for theism. His great book is a defense of the worship of the one true God, the God who was acknowledged in ancient Israel, revealed in Christ, and venerated in the church. Like other early Christian apologists, he realized that it was not enough to make vague appeals to transcendent reality, to the god of philosophers, to a deity that takes no particular form in human life. The god of theism has no life independent of the practice of religion, of those who know God in prayer and devotion, who belong to a community of memory, and are bound together in common service. Only people schooled in the religious life, people like Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego, can tell the difference between serving the one God faithfully and bowing down to idols. For Augustine defense of the worship of the true God inevitably required a defense of the church, the City of God as it exists in time.

Eliot's *Christianity and Culture* admonishes us to take up the challenge of conceiving anew a Christian society. By a Christian society, he did not mean one that was composed solely of Christians, but one in which human life is ordered to ends that are befitting the true God. "It would be a society in which the natural end of man—virtue and well-being in community—is acknowledged for all, and the supernatural end—beatitude—for those who have the eyes to see it." Only God can give ultimate purpose to our lives and direction to our society. The First Commandment is not just a text to be memorized in catechism class; it is the theological basis for a just and humane society.

I am reminded of a story I heard years ago in Germany when Walter Ulbricht, the German Communist leader, was head of the DDR. It was said that Ulbricht once had a conversation with Karl Barth about the new society that was being built in East Germany. Ulbricht boasted to Barth that the Communists would be teaching the Ten Commandments in the schools and that the precepts of the decalogue would provide the moral foundation for the new society. Barth listened politely and then said: "I have only one question, Herr Minister. Will you also be teaching the First Commandment?" FT

Ritenuto: With My Daughter at the Lake

The Falls Road northern light was fading gray:
a sudden snowfall swept us eastward like
a curtain rising at the driveway to the lake.
I stopped my car beside the bridge and hiked out to the day's
last scene which starred my strong and happy sons
fast racing up along a gravelled path,
each to test the measure of his breath
and call his sister, "Here, come see, I've won."

She, beside me walking with her secret joys,
motioned her two gloved hands airborne
toward a stick out on the lake beyond the boys,
a dark branch balanced at the dam's ledge, in the roar
and plunging of that river on whose cascade into noise
it seemed to hesitate, poised there at the edge of more.

Hannah Strauss

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Wishing People Dead

Nancy L. Harvey

Christine Busalacchi, a Missouri woman suffering from serious brain damage, died on the 8th of March, 1993. The cause of death was starvation. Her case was not a nationally famous one, but it does serve to raise certain disturbing questions—questions that must confront the families of anyone who is helpless and unable to communicate effectively and that will also continue to confront not only medical care givers but judges and law enforcers as well. For Christine's death followed the deliberate decision of the state's attorney general to allow those involved in her medical treatment to withhold food and water on the grounds that life support was no longer beneficial to her.

This decision and its outcome stirred a good deal of local protest from people who felt that Christine's family and doctors had made a dangerous decision—tantamount, at least in the eyes of some, to murder. In answer to this protest, the director of the Center for Health Care Ethics at the St. Louis University Medical Center, a Dominican priest named Kevin O'Rourke, published a piece in the March 19, 1993 *St. Louis Post Dispatch* entitled "When Life Support Doesn't Help."

In this piece Father O'Rourke examines what he calls the "assumptions" of the protesters, and in the course of doing so reveals certain assumptions of his own, assumptions that are important, not because they are his, but because they lie at the heart of the whole debate about life support for the helpless.

Father O'Rourke's first assumption, and the basis of all the others, is that a severely brain-damaged person is better off dead. He does not, of course, put the case quite so bluntly. He writes, "No benefit to the patient results if mere physiological function is prolonged. Does it help people to continue their physiological function . . . if they will never regain the ability to think, talk, love, or relate to other people?"

Now, there may be no question when such words are used to apply to a person who is brain-dead. Medical science simply cannot resurrect dead tissue. But, as it happened, Christine was not brain-dead. And living brain cells can learn some of the tasks that the dead cells once performed. The first question, then, is whether brain-damaged people should be treated as if they were brain-dead. This is where the term Persistent Vegetative State comes in. A person in PVS is supposedly someone whose cerebral cortex does not function, and who consequently feels neither pleasure nor pain. Even if it should appear that such a person is responding, such responses are purely random.

Father O'Rourke is convinced that Christine was in PVS because the doctors said so. At least six board-certified neurospecialists made this diagnosis, basing their opinions on "PET scans" and "thorough clinical studies." But several of her long-term caretakers, including at least one doctor, testified in court that she was not in PVS, basing their opinion on observations extending over months or even years. Since brain cells can learn other tasks, it is possible that a severely brain-damaged person like Christine could regain at least some ability to feel pleasure and pain, and to relate to other people. But obviously, only long-term observation could answer such a question. Only those who were in close daily contact with Christine could watch her responses to see if they were meaningful. Those who had actually been taking care of her did watch her and did notice that certain responses kept recurring in the same situations. They concluded that the responses had meaning. If, for example, she smiled at jokes, they concluded that she was responding meaningfully, perhaps to the joke, perhaps to the caretaker's tone of voice or smile. Had she smiled at jokes, and at sad stories, and

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at the stock market report, it would have been reasonable to conclude that her smiles were random. Her long-term caretakers testified that she felt pleasure and pain, that she responded to music, and that she did, indeed, smile at jokes.

Why was such testimony ignored by the legal and medical authorities? It would not have been ignored in a court of law. If PVS were a crime, Christine would still be alive, for there would be far too much reasonable doubt to allow a guilty verdict, let alone a death sentence. It is hard not to think that some people did not care whether Christine was in PVS or only had a very limited ability to respond.

Father O'Rourke, like most of us, assumes that doctors know best. But medical science has its limits. A doctor can use a scan to see which areas of the brain are badly damaged, and he knows what functions go with which areas. But without long-term observation he cannot tell if brain cells are relearning other tasks. Furthermore, he cannot assume that a brain-damaged person will respond to a strange doctor in the same way that she would respond to a familiar caretaker. Perhaps she did not respond when the doctor called her name, but this does not mean that she was unable to respond. We understand this point better when we are dealing with those whose cerebral cortexes are not yet fully developed. We know that a baby may choose to smile at Mama and not at us. We have all met a two-year-old who counts to ten for Grandma, but not for us. No scan or clinical study can measure a person's willingness to respond.

And what of the quality of the response? How much ability to "think, love, talk, or relate to other people" must there be before a brain-damaged person's life will be legally protected? To whom must this ability be demonstrated? Who will establish the criteria? What will these criteria be? Father O'Rourke does not say, but he is perfectly prepared to speak of the need to assess the economic and psychic burdens on the family and society represented by helpless people.

There are certainly plenty of burdens out there to assess. All of us are helpless burdens when we are very young. Some of us will be burdens when we grow old. Cancer and AIDS can turn us into burdens at any age. And those with physical disabilities are not the only burdens. In an economic sense, everyone in prison or on welfare is a burden. Is it wise to allow those who are burdened to dispose of those who burden them? Should individual families have the right to define "beneficial" and "burdensome" however they please, so that one brain-damaged daughter gets food and water while another gets the "benefit" of death by dehydration?

But Father O'Rourke does not think this case will set a precedent. He finds such reasoning misleading "because it fails to recognize the vital ethical issue: Life support may be withdrawn only if it is ineffective or extremely burdensome. We must distinguish between life support that is beneficial for a person and life support that is not beneficial." He says that the family that withdraws food and water does not necessarily intend to kill the patient, but only to "stop doing things that are ineffective or futile."

Now the words "ineffective," "futile," or "burdensome" have a certain medical meaning. A treatment is futile or ineffective if it does not cure or arrest the problem. No one will say that antibiotics are futile if they are killing the staph germs. That is their job. No one will say that radiation therapy is futile if it is shrinking the cancer. Such treatments can be considered burdensome if they cause more problems than they solve—the antibiotics are destroying the patient's kidneys, or the radiation is causing pancreatitis. In such cases the patient may have to stop treatment. But to my knowledge, these are the only instances in which medical therapy is considered ineffective, futile, or burdensome—either it is not stopping the disease, or it is causing life-threatening side effects or extreme suffering.

Were these things happening with Christine? Were her food and water failing to arrest a disease or causing her serious side effects or extreme suffering? On the contrary, her food and water were giving her the only benefit they have to offer. They were keeping her alive in a fairly comfortable, healthy state. This is all food and water can do for anybody; they do not cure brain damage. How, then, could Christine's food and water be considered "futile," "ineffective," "excessively burdensome," and "not beneficial"?

We do not stop radiation therapy for a cancer patient because it doesn't cure her arthritis, and we do not stop administering antibiotics because the patient still has cataracts. We do not call a treatment ineffective or futile if it does not cure something it was never supposed to cure.

Why is all this stood on its head when the patient in question is severely brain-damaged? Why were the meanings of "beneficial" and "not beneficial" reversed for Christine so that keeping her alive was "not beneficial" and giving her food and water was "futile" and "burdensome"? True, the chances were slim that Christine's condition would improve, but no one (yet) suggests that it is acceptable to withhold food and water from quadraplegics, though their chances of recovering are about as likely as Christine's were. No one says that food and water are "futile" for people with muscular dystrophy or multiple sclerosis. Some of these people cannot feed themselves, and food and water will not cure them. But since they are mentally alert, there is no movement to consider their food and water futile and withdraw them.

But such examples do not mean that no one else is in danger. The brain-damaged are not the only

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people who cannot "think, love, talk, or relate to other people." There are autistic children. Stroke victims. People with Alzheimer's. And my Aunt Helen. She was an elderly woman, single, no children or husband, living on social security disability. She had some health problems, but she was able to care for herself until about ten years ago, when she became so confused that she had to be hospitalized. Severe Alzheimer's was the diagnosis. She refused to eat because she was afraid of poison. A nose tube was used until her throat became raw. Then doctors told us that they could put in a stomach tube, although they seemed reluctant to do so. Or they could do nothing, and we were told that in three or four days it would all be over. Helen was able to feel pain and had some ability to talk and relate to other people. But her ability to think rationally was not there. Obviously, her doctors had enlarged Father O'Rourke's criteria. We could have chosen to let a confused elderly woman die of thirst. We did not. We demanded that her medications be carefully evaluated. Some were stopped and some were changed. The confusion cleared up and my aunt was again able to feed herself. It's hard to believe that Aunt Helen was the only person with Alzheimer's ever to have her food and water considered "not beneficial" by doctors.

We can see the same thing happening when surgery that would not be questioned for a normal newborn has suddenly become "not beneficial" for a Down's Syndrome child. Of course, in such cases as Christine's and Aunt Helen's, we try to fool our consciences by saying that we are merely stopping treatment and that it is the "underlying pathology the life support has been circumventing" that really kills the patient. However, Alzheimer's and severe brain damage do not affect the digestive system.They merely render the patient helpless. If I take away milk from a baby, does it die because it has an underdeveloped neuro-muscular-skeletal system? I myself happen to be living on artificial life support and I know the difference between food and water and "medical therapy." There is a medical difference, and although Father O'Rourke says not, there is an ethical difference as well.

"Medical therapy" is something added. Something that a normal, healthy person does not need. And medical therapy is not neutral. If given unnecessarily, it will upset a person's normal functioning. This upset may be quite mild, as it would be if we were to treat a normal person for shock. Or it could be fatal, as it would be if we gave a normal person injections of insulin.

My artificial life support, which is necessary to treat short bowel syndrome, would damage a normal person, since it bypasses the digestive system entirely. If the person continued to eat, he would become obese; if he stopped eating, he would be at risk for bile duct obstruction. My life support, parenteral nutrition, allows dextrose, amino acids, and electrolytes to go directly into the bloodstream. But Christine's and Aunt Helen's food and water went directly to the stomach and were digested. In neither case was there an "underlying pathology" that was preventing the digestive system from working. And while it is true that a stomach tube is not a natural method of delivering food, it is not in the same category as parenteral nutrition. To make such a comparison would be like comparing a patient who has a urinary catheter to one on kidney dialysis. The stomach tube and the catheter help the body to perform its natural functions—they do not replace major organs. Since I have no intestine to speak of, food and water are indeed futile for me. No matter how much I eat and drink I cannot keep myself alive. This was not the case with Christine. Food and water were beneficial for her, but only if we consider that her life was still a benefit.

Calling food and water medical treatment eases the consciences of those who request and those who decree that they can be turned off. After all, if a cancer patient elects to stop treatment, we are not murderers if we decide to let him do so, since the treatment being stopped is either causing intense suffering or failing to arrest the disease. But Christine was not suffering from any disease. How, then, could food and water be considered a cure? Everyone needs food and water, but only sick or injured people need treatment—and as we know, some of these do survive without treatment. But no one has ever been able to break the body's absolute need for food and water. The only result of withdrawing them is death, always and everywhere, with no exceptions. Father O'Rourke says that family members do "not necessarily intend to kill the patient" when they withdraw food and water. This is confusing desire with motive. If a person is brain-dead, most of us do not want him to linger on and on. Some of us are glad when AIDS or cancer patients who have gone through months or years of pain die. We feel great loss, but we are not ashamed to say that we are glad that the suffering is over.

Therefore we can understand Father O'Rourke, and others who honestly believed that Christine was no different from a brain-dead person, desiring her death. The thought of a mere body, living with no awareness of its surroundings, no ability to exchange a smile with another person, no ability to enjoy the feeling of clean sheets on a bed—it does not seem wrong to wish such a person dead, set free from the broken body that stubbornly refuses even to get sick. But to deny that this is what we want when we take away the food and water is merely self-delusion. There is no other reason to take away a healthy but helpless person's food and water. There is no other possible outcome. Such denial is like pouring water on someone while saying we don't intend for him to be wet. We may have good reasons for drenching

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him—his clothes were on fire, he was starting to faint, or perhaps he was dirty. But whatever our reason for doing it, he must be wet in order to receive the benefit, and we are not afraid to say that we intend for him to be very wet indeed.

What benefit does a person like Christine receive from death? We don't know. We cannot contrast the limited life she had here with some "benefit" in her life hereafter, because we know nothing about it. Her body is now rotting; this is the only "benefit" which we know for certain that death has given her.

Father O'Rourke says that allowing her this "benefit" is not opposed to Catholic doctrine. Catholic doctrine admits life after death, and purgatory too, along with eternal torment for those who have not pleased God. There is, however, no hint (I would like to be corrected if I am wrong) either in Scripture or Church tradition that death is such a good thing that we may allow those who are burdensome to us to die so that they can go on and be happy in heaven—this despite the fact that there were many more such "burdens" in the world back when the New Testament was being recorded and throughout the centuries as Church doctrine developed. Perhaps we have forgotten just how much human wreckage there was, burdening families and society. More children were born brain-damaged because there were almost no Caesarians. A simple cut could cause a brain-damaging staph infection. Those who succumbed to smallpox, diphtheria, tetanus, scarlet fever, and other such diseases didn't all die. Many of them lived on as cripples—brain-damaged, disfigured, or both. We seem to have forgotten what back-breaking work was needed to care for a helpless person when everything had to be washed by hand, when water had to be carried from a well, when an invalid's food had to be prepared completely from scratch and spoon-fed. Yet the Church championed those who were burdens and ministered to them, considering that in caring for the helpless, one was really caring for Christ Himself.

It is evident that to Father O'Rourke, and to those who agreed with the decision to let her starve. Christine did not have this value. To them, her life was useless. The simple pleasures that she could and did enjoy—ice cream, music, a trip outside in a wheelchair—were not enough, not deserving of legal protection or even the benefit of the doubt. Therefore her food and water were taken away, forever ending the possibility that improvement might be observed or that medical science might discover ways to help her. Is it "beneficial" to a society that wants to preserve individual liberty that people's lives should depend on how burdensome or beneficial they are? "Burden" and "benefit" can be defined in many different ways, and will vary from family to family and from doctor to doctor. Even medical ethicists disagree with each other. Ultimately, these definitions depend on one's deepest beliefs about the nature of God and man. There is the potential for terrible cruelty and injustice if a person's life hangs on the definition of a word. Such a thing is far too frail to bear the weight of something that cannot be replaced. FT

Leah

how was it that he would want to earn *her,*
a second wife?

desire
the way he would shear at my father's sheep

every muscle bent
and his neck throbbing
a hidden sun from some distant blessing
desire
even as he ate the food i would prepare
with his fingers held mid air
at times
the only talking between us
how was it then . . .
into our nights where
everything practical
measured became
for every son i bore him
the war i could never win

Sister Lou Ella Hickman

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The Necessary Devil

John P. Sisk

According to a recent Gallup poll, 52 percent of people say they believe in the Devil. One can imagine that this slim majority is not good news for the Devil, who after all is not running for public office. In the Christian tradition he is utterly insatiable and wants it all. But he may be more successful than Gallup's statistics indicate if we take into account Baudelaire's remark that "the Devil's cleverest wile is to convince us that he does not exist." Feed this possibility into the Gallup computer and one implication is that 48 percent of the people have been thoroughly conned and are thus wonderfully vulnerable to diabolic mischief-making.

Gallup does not tell us what in particular that 52 percent believe about the Devil. No doubt to many of them he is, as Denis De Rougemont puts it in *The Devil's Share*, "a leering and horned demon skulking in the dark, animated by the worst intentions." This Devil gets less attention than he did in less sophisticated times when St. Peter's image of the roaring lion that "walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" still had canonical force. It is clear, nevertheless, that the media have been reluctant to let this old-fashioned Devil go. He continues to appear in lurid accounts of ritual human and animal killings, sacramental cannibalism and blood-drinking—to say nothing of the Halloween antics of pseudo-religious groups like Anton LaVey's First Church of Satan, once dignified in a *Time* cover story (June 19, 1972). Then there is the romance with the satanic as we have seen it in the rock music world of Prince and the Rolling Stones, especially as the latter are presented in Stanley Booth's *Dance with the Devil* and Philip Norman's *Symphony for the Devil*. Predictably, the supermarket tabloids have heated up this romance. Not long ago one of them reported that the Devil had emerged from a hole being drilled in Alaska and in his rage at this invasion of his privacy had killed a number of the workmen. Indeed, one might say that the tabloids have judged the nonexistence of the Devil to be shockingly unacceptable. Who would be more upset than the *National Enquirer* if the Church decided that the Devil was now so securely confined in Hell that he could be ignored?

Mark Twain, especially in his later and very disaffected years, was one of that 48 percent who did not believe in Satan. Nor did he believe in Shakespeare (he was a Baconian) or the Old Testament God, whose sadistic cruelty was exemplified for Twain in the creation of the housefly. Satan, however, becomes the cool and utterly reliable inside-dopester who, in Twain's posthumously published *Letters from the Earth*, visits Earth and reports back to his celestial friends Michael and Gabriel about the stupidities, inconsistencies, and malevolence of what Twain elsewhere calls "the damned human race." It is noteworthy that even in Heaven this Satan had found the Deity's dictatorial conduct morally offensive and was known for his subtle sarcasms about "certain of the Creator's sparkling industries," so that in celestial circles he was something of a First Amendment hero. Indeed, his "flexible tongue" had already earned him temporary banishments. Obviously, such a turned-off observer does not have to waste any of his time on Earth as a corrupter. Through no fault of his own, things there are already bad enough. His main problem, one might say, is to maintain his own integrity as a truth-teller in such a corrupting environment. In fact, Twain's Satan comes on like a Calvinist who has lost faith in an omniscient and omnipotent Deity and thus may be a reflection of Twain's own distaste for the Calvinist strain in American Protestantism.

Twain's Satan, in fact, is the intransigent moralist

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that for a long time now we have expected the post-enlightenment intellectual to be. It is likely that the latter no more believes in Satan than Twain did, and it is likely too that he is less concerned with improving the damned human race than with undermining its pieties with a hermeneutic of suspicion, perhaps employing a flexible tongue to anatomize its absurd claim to be superior among creatures. We expect from him, and even, as they nowadays say, privilege, his uncompromising adversary voice, particularly if it attacks bourgeois, consumerist democracy. Lionel Trilling once observed that in Flaubert's novel *Bouvard and Pecuchet* "bourgeois democracy merely affords the setting for a situation in which it becomes possible to reject culture itself." In this perspective, irreverence toward the rituals and symbols of established culture becomes (as it did for Twain's Satan, if not for Twain himself) the higher reverence. The adversarial intellectual is in the service to an implied ideal order to which he has the unmediated access that Emerson had to the Oversoul, or that the Gnostics of the early Christian centuries had to the true God. Such an idealist, again like Twain's Satan, is constitutionally suspicious of all accumulations of power—so much so that he often seems to define virtue as a condition of absolute nonbeing.

This Satan, both when Twain wrote and now, has the advantage of being a moral simplifier. His first postulate is that doing good is nothing more than avoiding evil, while his second is that in a Demiurge-ruled universe there is always available to an elite a trustworthy perspective in which anyone and everything at any time can be seen as nothing but evil. As Hans Jonas, scholar of Gnosticism, points out, such a morality is a liberating release from the burdens of charity, prudence, and casuistry that always complicate moral choosing for the nonelite. Twain's Satan and his kind can pose as intransigent haters of evil only if they can command the perspectives of choosing. One of their problems is to keep us from seeing that their moral outrage with damnable human conduct is not consistent with a theodicy committed to the belief that the human race is no more damnable than one would expect it to be given the irresistible ill will of its Creator. Another of their problems is to keep us from discovering that their disgust with the damned human race is only a reflection of the self-disgust that Twain confessed he shared with Byron. To discover this is to suspect that their moral outrage is at bottom a sentimental indulgence in which doing good had been confused with feeling good in adversarial circumstances.

In any event, such an adversarial voice has no alternative to rejecting culture, just as Harold Bloom in his recent *The American Religion* has no alternative to rejecting Christianity, Judaism, and the Bible. The ultimate adversary in this view is the Gnostic's evil Demiurge who rules not only the world but who in order to do so must disguise himself as the Judeo-Christian God. If such a metaphysical reversal tends to spread confusion, disgust, and despair among the damned human race—at the same time blurring the distinction between malevolent and benevolent adversaries—it is still possible for toughened optimists to believe that this is only the destruction that precedes fresh creation. In this perspective (shared by such bold French reversers as Georges Bataille, the Marquis de Sade, E. M. Cioran, and Antonin Artaud), Twain's moral rigorist becomes a necessary Devil who, like Wallace Stevens' necessary angel in "Angel Surrounded by Paysans," helps us see the earth as it truly is.

But there are other necessary Devils. There is, for instance, the Entertainer Devil who finds boredom not only absolutely intolerable but morally offensive as well. Twain's Satan, in fact, sees the sadism of the Old Testament God as an escape from a universe that would otherwise have bored Him with its unrelieved sweetness and light. This Entertainer Devil is a darling of the tabloids and rock bands, a merry prankster in the tradition of the German Till Eulenspiegel, whose knaveries directed against notables of the establishment inspire the belly laughs of schadenfreude that make the boringly oppressive human condition more tolerable. Like the trick-or-treat goblins you open the door to on Halloween or the spooky carnivalesque of LaVey's First Church of Satan, he abolishes the humdrum, if only momentarily. We can imagine that Twain's cool and unillusioned Satan would be disgusted with such palpable sentimentalities. But at the same time he is shrewd enough to realize that if he really were the traditional Christians' Devil he would have to be an entertainer to make his case that without him the alternative is boredom without end. He would have to recognize that in sentimentality there is not only an escape from boredom but the divorce of feeling from responsibility that serves him by making no end of trouble for humans.

But the Entertainer Devil is no harder to believe in and no more necessary than his alter ego, the Liberator Devil. When he appears to Eve in *Paradise Lost*, Milton's Satan is the consummate flatterer who beguiles "our credulous Mother" into believing that she is one "who shouldst be seen/ A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd/ By Angels numberless, thy daily Train." Note that *shouldst*: the Liberator Devil, like Twain's Satan, is always a severe moralist, indignant with whatever victimizing forces deny us the personal fulfillment to which we are entitled. He is both New Age facilitator and anarchist. He knows that, deep down, humans, especially the young, don't want to be civilized. They only want to be happy, and their cruel fate is that in the process of trying only to be happy against the grain of established culture they

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manage, more or less, to get civilized. To the Liberator Devil it is an appalling state of affairs. Who would better understand Harold Bloom's fear that "we are on the verge of being governed by a nationally established religion"?

Such a religion, starved for lack of creative misreadings, would be all life-denying interdictions. The Liberator Devil would agree with Milton's Satan that "the mind is its own place, and in itself/ Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n." So he models that freedom from the interdictions associated with the conventional Heaven that keep one from realizing one's full potential as a social critic. He helps us put in its proper context the conduct that society has conditioned us to disapprove of—acts that range from the sexual libertinism of the Marquis de Sade to the minor sadisms of the Rolling Stones: urinating in public against a service station wall, trashing the hotel rooms in which they stayed, distributing their semen with indiscriminate generosity to avid groupies. Such exuberant practices might be delinquent in the eyes of the uptight establishment, but they celebrate a condition of liberated empowerment in opposition to the traditional family's tendency to subordinate the natural, and often enough creative, delinquency of the young to the needs of social order. This, of course, is the order of the illiberal Demiurge, who in the interest of thwarting the Liberator Devil will even go to the extreme of endorsing the efforts of Tipper Gore and her kind to clean up rap and rock lyrics.

The Liberator Devil is on the side of those who have the courage not to be deflected from their moral obligation to put self-fulfillment first. This is why he encourages those rituals of desecration that counter a worshipful self-abasement to authority, whether human or divine. Historically, his most dramatic ritual has been the black mass; but he is nothing if not au courant and probably recognizes that black masses are as cultishly old-fashioned and limited in their appeal as the old Latin mass is to most Catholics. Besides, as a result of its ritualistic formalities, the black mass is insufficiently liberated from the traditional mass. The Liberator Devil therefore encourages more democratic forms of desecration that combine moral outrage with entertainment, as is the case with rap artists like Ice-T or the rock singer G. G. Allin, who, in an expression of artistic freedom, once defecated on stage and threw the feces at the audience.

Most likely Allin did not know that he was only doing in a small way what Flaubert once confessed to Turgenev that he longed to do before he died: empty "a few more buckets of sh— on the head of my fellow men." The Liberator Devil puts such violations of bourgeois toilet training in a context both heroic and aesthetic, encouraging the conviction that the true artist will always dare to offend the etiolated sensibilities of the overcivilized. Perhaps, being a radical revisionist, he would prefer a new and Flaubertian ending to the story of Hercules' sixth labor, the cleansing of the Augean stables by diverting through them the rivers Alpheus and Peneus. When King Augeas refused to pay for this work, the morally outraged Hercules should not have killed the king outright but retrieved the flushed-out ordure and smothered the king under it.

We can believe at the same time that the Liberator Devil is not a fanatic about these matters. No doubt, like Milton's Satan, he would have preferred the entrancing aroma of the earthly Paradise to the stench of Augean cattle droppings. Besides, the latter means houseflies, and it is likely that he finds them as obnoxious as Twain and his Satan did. But there is a larger issue here so that the end justifies the odoriferous means. What this Devil needs to encourage is the human tendency to identify as liberating the reduction of any aspiration, however seemingly noble or virtuous, to bodily wastes, as if he were an ardent press agent for the scatological mysticism of the French writer Georges Bataille. Ultimately, this is to make a virtue of self-disgust, a form of inverse transcendence that can issue creatively in the higher forms of desecration. When that caca rocker G. G. Allin threw his feces at the audience he was acting in the tradition of exposé writers, ancient and modern: forcing the audience to confront the dirty truth behind the sentimental illusions that structure its life. The Milwaukee jury's refusal to accept his argument that he was only exercising his artistic freedom simply highlighted the hypocrisy of the damned human race that so appalled Twain's Satan and such of his epigones as the late Lenny Bruce—whose scatological humor, as the late Ralph Gleason once pointed out in *Rolling Stone*, "challenged society at its very roots."

In another and necessary guise the Liberator Devil is the Prince of Cynics who knows how serious a threat sentimentality is to anyone's aspiration to autonomy. He knows how easily humans in their affective attachments can be carried off in directions dangerous to his interests, how perverse is their capacity to transmute sentimentality and cliché into self-abnegating commitments. To prevent such defections from his own hard-won orthodoxy, the Liberator Devil models himself as the cool hipster ironically detached from whoever and whatever threatens the individual's solitary integrity with sentimental interdictions. The sentimentalist, for all his easy evasions, remains precariously rooted in the moil of history, vulnerable to unpredictable infusions of grace, and may at any moment be persuaded to give something of himself away. The Liberator Devil, wanting it all, wants none of this and counsels the surefire simplifications of cynical detachment. Being a good psychologist, he probably knows that the awareness of being so superiorly detached in a roiling world

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can give great sentimental pleasure. One may even sense this kind of sentimentality in the self-congratulatory irony of Twain's Satan, who no doubt enjoys the exercise of his flexible tongue as much as Twain himself did.

And of course there is the palpable sentimentality of the romance of the satanic, exemplified in the designation of a microphone-eater like Mick Jagger as the Prince of Darkness—a beatification that might be creatively misread by skeptics as a desecrating burlesque of whatever Devils there are. But here any Devil worthy of the name would recognize that such an adolescent charade should not only be permitted but encouraged, as chauvinistic excesses are in wartime, since the cause they cannot help but serve is generous enough in scope to bend them to its purpose. In the perspective of the Liberator Devil, in any event, the sentimentality of the cynic is expected to be safely beyond all naiveté and false consciousness so that it is ultimately the higher sentimentality, just as the irreverence of desecration is the higher reverence. The self-indulgent pleasures of cynicism are thus less a defect than a bonus granted to the right people on the right side.

In the meantime, and given the roil and moil of the world, it is likely that among Gallup's 52 percent who believe in the Devil are many who also believe that he is so much in command of the situation that to go with him is to go with a sure winner. Indeed, whatever his disguise, he can project for those who need it the commanding and challenging image of one who has taken the hard way and stayed the course—who, like Milton's Satan, will always choose heroic autonomy over "ignoble ease," and who, like Twain's Satan and Lenny Bruce, knows bullshit when he sees it. In an epistemologically scrambled world he appeals to a need to believe that life can be grounded on an absolute so solid and singular that nothing of oneself will ever have to be given away to a counter-absolute.

Still, it is plain that the Devil's lot is not an easy one. Charity, however contaminated by sentimentality, continues to be operant in the world. As a moralist, the Devil is a perfectionist who must encourage the belief that all power is evil—except, of course, the power that makes it possible to take and propagandize that position. Nevertheless, some people continue to do the "good" things he disapproves of, often at great personal expense and against all odds, even as they enjoy the use of power to do so. It is not surprising, then, that other people (Gallup does not say how many, but the third-century theologian Origen was thought by some of his contemporaries to belong in this category) not only have sympathy for the Devil but believe that in the fullness of time, when the tents of the Apocalypse have been struck, the Devil himself will be saved—having proven to be as dialectically necessary to a final grand unity as in the Marxian view selfish bourgeois capitalists will prove to have been to the final triumph of the proletariat.

Here, in fact, we may be in the presence of one of the most necessary of all Devils: the Ecumenical Unifier, champion of all efforts to remove invidious distinctions between nature and nurture, body and spirit, interdiction and impulse, time and eternity, individual and community, male and female, Hell and Heaven—and ultimately, of course, between man and God. The Rolling Stones themselves once announced their commitment to such a transcendent vision in a Hyde Park concert, when after a release of five thousand butterflies Mick Jagger recited two stanzas from Shelley's "Adonais": "The One remains, the many change and pass;/ Heaven's light forever shines, Earth's shadows fly. . ." It is unlikely that the Devil in any of his disguises would find life in such a Neoplatonic wonderland anything but boring—though like Twain's Satan, he might find butterflies an improvement over houseflies. He would recognize it immediately as democracy carried to the extreme of anarchic levelling where cliché and sentimentality are safe from all opposition: in short, as nothing more than the prescription for self-diminishment that Heaven was to begin with. Nevertheless, he continues to tantalize humans with a vision of absolute harmony shrewdly calculated to foster the Gnostic disgust with the inharmonious human condition that fires the imaginations of writers like Juvenal, Swift, and Twain.

There is no point in wasting sympathy on this Devil. He does not want to be saved. He wants to scramble those "signals of transcendence" (Peter Berger's fine term) which if unscrambled speak to a yearning for a kind of salvation that to him is damnation. When in his disguise as an intransigent truth-teller he identifies this yearning as nothing more than a failure of nerve, he is not only being quite honest but is saying what he must if he is to keep up his own nerve in the touchiest of situations. As a professional bullshit detector, his only course is to expose as fraudulent the enchantments that have always kept the damned human race in thrall to his grand Adversary, but he must do this while striving to re-enchant it in his own darkly romantic terms. So he is caught between a rock and a hard place: he cannot succeed without fostering in humans that boundless appetite for enchantment that has always made them susceptible to the unscrambled signals of transcendence. If this Devil wants to be saved from anything it is from the exigencies of the ego-diminishing role he must play in a metaphysical drama he longs to revise.

One might say that the Devil's continuing success depends not only on a shrewdly chosen assortment of disguises but on his principled rejection of the Pelagian position that evil is separable from the

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human condition. Having, like Milton's Satan, elected evil as his good, he has a conservative's suspicion of a theodicy that threatens to reverse his reversal and put him out of business: after all, he has a stake in the reality of evil, however much he may encourage an empowering nihilism among his victims. An effective Devil must have the absolute moral certainty that Twain's Satan has, otherwise some skeptics will say he is only playing a game and secretly hopes to be saved in the end. Fortunately, being a subtle postmodernist, he is able to bend Pelagianism's dim view of the doctrine of original sin to his own purpose. So he becomes a stalwart defender of the trustworthiness of natural impulse against the life-denying interdictions of a society that in the interests of its own survival continues to give lip service to an Augustinian anti-Pelagianism.

The Devil's determination to keep the faith should be seen as a comfort to all those who cannot imagine a life that is not illumined, enfranchised, and empowered by his many disguises. But if they have to believe at the same time that he will be saved in a universal amnesty at the end of history they may themselves be demoralized in history: condemned to playing walk-on parts in a drama the foreknown conclusion of which mocks their life-enhancing transgressive efforts. Against this fearful possibility the Devil's neatest trick may be his creation of a state of dependency between himself and his victims—so that they are united with him in an implicit community that is fashioning its own salvation as it goes along.

Such a community, liberated from all traditional structuring and self-diminishing dogmas, would appear to be anything but the national religion that Harold Bloom fears, however Gnostic it might be in its commitment to a grand counter-dogma for an elite. Under the Liberator Devil's tutelage such a community might, in fact, reach back for support to those Gnostic libertines who were in effect the Rolling Stones of the early Christian centuries. In them, says Hans Jonas, "we find sometimes the freedom to do everything turned into a positive *obligation* to perform every kind of action, with the idea of rendering to nature its own and thereby exhausting its powers." Surely the covertly anti-Pelagian Devil is smart enough to see that such a hubristic Gnosticism is on his side. With its assistance he can afford to relax a bit and let nature take its course, even at the risk of putting himself on the slippery slope to ignoble ease. FT

The Failed Suicide

You have returned to find so much more
To despair: the flesh whiter,
More helpless, the city stinking
As never before, and those
Whom you had so carefully avoided
Are bringing tea and blankets now,
The bounty of their gardens.

Later, you find a potato
Rolled from the table, rolled
To the corner where it rests
With unnameable food crumbs,
Cobwebs, and dust. Still grubby
From the earth, it squats like a rock
In its armor of thin skin and dirt,
Eyes on all sides watching. Everything about it
Says *I won't budge* Everything
Repeats how it wants to remain,
Not to be boiled or mashed or left
To soften, stinking, in the cupboard
Beneath the sink. Everything about it
Says how wrong you were, it says
Look: the world is like this.

Victoria McCabe

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Religion and the Court 1993

Raul F. Yanes and Mary Ann Glendon

Religious litigants claimed victories in all four cases involving religious freedom to reach the Supreme Court this past term. Far from clear, however, is whether any of these hard-fought legal wins represents significant progress for citizens resisting the cultural forces bent on constricting the role of religion in American life.

The first words of the First Amendment command that "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." About fifty years ago, a funny thing happened to this language in the nation's highest judicial forum. As the Supreme Court began to hold the states to the same constitutional standards as the federal government, it sliced the religion language in two, creating a "free exercise" jurisprudence to handle claims by individuals that government action infringed their freedom of religion, and an "establishment" jurisprudence to police government activity viewed as impermissibly favoring a religion or religion in general. This fateful distinction, introduced with little discussion of its implications, resulted in a body of constitutional law condemned as unprincipled, incoherent, and unworkable by Court-watchers of virtually every stripe. More important, the cases in which it was developed have eroded the religious freedom of Americans through a stingy interpretation of protected "free exercise" rights and a remarkably broad conception of what constitutes an "establishment" of religion. In recent years, several justices joined the chorus of critics calling for a fundamental rethinking of the Court's approach in religion cases. In a pair of decisions handed down in June, however, the Court again passed up an opportunity to reexamine the basic principles undergirding its precedents.

Church of the Lukumi Babalu Aye v. City of Hialeah attracted a great deal of press attention for its exotic facts, but its chief interest to church-state experts arose from the opportunity it afforded to clarify the Court's "free exercise" doctrine. The dispute arose when members of the Afro-Cuban religion Santeria, whose central rituals require animal sacrifice, announced their plans to open a church in Hialeah, Florida. Hialeah officials responded by passing ordinances outlawing animal sacrifice as practiced by the Santeros, and the Santeria Church sued in federal court to block enforcement of the ordinances.

All nine justices agreed that Hialeah had unconstitutionally singled out the religious activity of the Santeros, thereby violating the religion clause's "fundamental nonpersecution principle." The only significant disagreement among the justices was over which test to apply in free exercise cases. Justices Blackmun, O'Connor, and Souter argued for a return to the standard the Court had purported to apply in free exercise cases from the early 1960s until 1990. Under that "compelling interest" test, any law which burdened religious practice had to be justified by a government interest of the highest order and had to be carefully drawn to minimize the degree to which religious practice was infringed. Justice Scalia's controversial 1990 opinion for the Court in the "peyote" case (*Employment Division v. Smith*) had departed from that test, suggesting that if a law was "neutral" and of "general applicability" it was not in violation of the free exercise clause even if it burdened religious practice. As many of its critics have pointed out, *Smith* essentially announced a nondiscrimination principle: so long as a law did not take direct aim at a religious practice, it was constitutional. In this sense, *Smith* does represent a retreat from the Court's prior free exercise standard. But the fact is that the Court, in the "compelling interest" cases, had paid lip service to free exercise rights while seldom ruling in favor of religious claimants. *Smith* critics hoped that, in the Santeria case, the Court would reinstate the old test *and* begin applying it. But the Hialeah ordinances presented such a blatant instance of governmental discrimination against a religious group that they violated even the deferential *Smith* standard and therefore the majority did not feel any need to consider whether the Court should modify *Smith*. The narrow Santeria decision, therefore, leaves unusual or unpopular religious practices vulnerable to legislative infringement.

On the establishment front, *Zobrest v. Catalina Foothills School District*, also decided in June, seemed an ideal vehicle for a break from the strict separationist precedents dating from the 1940s. The Court's approach in this area has been driven by the historically dubious notions that the establishment language was meant to create a "wall of separation" between religion and the government, that it pro-

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hibits all government aid to religion, and that government is required to be strictly neutral between religion and nonreligion. Court majorities have routinely ignored the important institutional and associational religious freedom issues raised in establishment cases, as they pursued the secularizing separationist project. With varying degrees of zeal, majorities used the establishment language as a roving mandate for the judiciary to second-guess legislative attempts to accommodate or cooperate with religious entities.

The facts of *Zobrest* starkly underscored the costs to religious freedom of this secularizing approach. An Arizona school district had determined that federal law required it to provide sign language interpreters for hearing-impaired students attending public and private schools, unless the private school was religious, in which case such assistance was unconstitutional. Accordingly, the school district denied the services of an interpreter to James Zobrest, a student in a Catholic high school who had been deaf since birth. James and his parents challenged the school district's refusal to provide interpreters for students in religious schools. From the Zobrests' perspective, the school district was using the vast power of the state to penalize parents who chose a religious education for their children. Two lower federal courts, citing the Supreme Court's separationist precedents, concluded that such discrimination against religious choice was constitutionally required.

Chief Justice Rehnquist, writing for a five-justice majority, disagreed. Two broad principles emerged from the Chief Justice's analysis. The first was that "religious institutions" are not "disabled by the First Amendment from participating in publicly sponsored social welfare programs," or, more specifically, that government programs "that neutrally provide benefits to a broad class of citizens defined without reference to religion are not readily subjected to an Establishment Clause challenge just because sectarian institutions may also receive an attenuated financial benefit." The second point stressed by the Chief Justice was that a government-paid interpreter would be present in a religious school "only as a result of the private decision of individual parents" and not by government dictate, and that this "private" choice further insulated the provision of the sign language interpreter from constitutional challenge.

Though the *Washington Post* described *Zobrest* as "a stark departure from prior rulings on the separation of church and state," the majority opinion did not directly challenge the Court's long-dominant separationist philosophy. That philosophy was on dress parade in Justice Blackmun's dissenting opinion. "Until now," Justice Blackmun declared ominously, "the Court never has authorized a public employee to participate directly in religious indoctrination." Under the Court's decision, he said, the Catholic high school would be permitted to enlist "the machinery of the State to enforce a religious orthodoxy."

A citizen unfamiliar with the Court's establishment cases may be surprised at the irate and buzz-word laden dissent from a decision that merely provided equal access to a program for hearing-impaired students. But for committed separationists, the slightest breach in the wall of separation justifies a call to the barricades. (*Zobrest* attracted more *amicus curiae* briefs than any other Supreme Court case this past term.) First launched in the 1940s, just as the size and reach of government at all levels was set to explode, separationism has produced a series of decisions in which the Court has blocked one modest legislative attempt after another to accommodate the religious practices of a diverse nation. Now-retired Justice Brennan wrote perhaps the most infamous of these decisions in his 1985 opinion for a 5-4 majority in *Aguilar v. Felton*, striking down a successful New York City program in which public teachers, for nineteen solid years, provided after-school remedial assistance to poor children in private schools, including religious schools. The Brennan decision was the subject of a methodical and withering attack by Justice O'Connor, who argued in her dissent that the majority, in its separationist dogmatism, simply ignored the facts: the New York program's long history provided no support whatsoever for the contention that the program's purpose or effect was anything other than to render academic assistance to the City's neediest children. Many who admired Justice O'Connor's *Aguilar* dissent hoped that the analogous factual situation in *Zobrest* would prompt her to lead the court in a decisive break from the zealotry that could produce decisions like *Aguilar*. Justice O'Connor, however, along with Justice Stevens, declined even to address the constitutional issue presented by *Zobrest*, on the technical grounds that the case should be returned to the trial court for further proceedings.

With the Santeria and *Zobrest* opinions providing little change in the Court's doctrines, perhaps the most significant development of the term was the indication that Justice Souter (by joining Justice Blackmun's *Zobrest* dissent) was picking up the banner of separationism long carried by the man he replaced, William Brennan. Souter's recent action in a school prayer case provides further evidence of his separationist leanings. Earlier in the term, the Court had refused to hear the appeal in *Jones v. Clear Creek Independent School District*, where an intermediate federal appellate court sitting in New Orleans held that the establishment provision does not prohibit a public high school from allowing seniors to choose student volunteers to deliver nonsectarian, nonproseltyzing invocations or benedictions at graduation ceremonies. Last year, the Supreme Court held in *Lee v. Weisman* that the establishment provision barred a public school principal from inviting a local clergyman to deliver a nonsectarian, nonproseltyzing invocation at a high school graduation ceremony. The *Jones* case reasoned that because *students*, rather than school officials, decided whether to have an invocation (and the invocation was delivered by a student) no constitutional concerns were implicated. Many hoped that the Supreme Court's decision not to hear the appeal in

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Jones indicated that the justices were willing to show more flexibility in tolerating religious speech in public ceremonies than some had feared after *Lee*. However, in June another intermediate federal appellate court, this one in Philadelphia, rejected the *Jones* analysis, reversing a New Jersey trial court's decision to allow student-led prayers at two high school commencements. School district attorneys sought emergency aid from the Supreme Court, but Justice Souter rejected their request. This development indicates that even student-led graduation prayers may not be tolerated by the emerging Supreme Court majority.

With Justice Souter now firmly in the separationist camp, that position has three supporters on the current court (Blackmun and Stevens are the other two). The retirement of Justice White, who perhaps better than any other current justice understood the institutional and associational aspects of religious freedom implicated in the establishment cases, cuts to four the number of justices who have rejected strict separationism (Rehnquist, Scalia, Kennedy, and Thomas). According to press accounts, "indications are" that the newest justice, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, "would be satisfied with a higher wall between church and state." That would leave the tally at 4-4, with the cautious Justice O'Connor holding the potentially decisive fifth vote. Her failure to address the merits in *Zobrest*, however, may mean that she is pulling back from the implications of her spirited *Aguilar* dissent. How she will analyze other cases where parental choice is at stake, e.g., school vouchers, is by no means clear.

The Court term, though, did produce one potentially far-reaching victory for religious freedom. In *Lamb's Chapel v. Center Moriches Union Free School District*, a unanimous Court held that if a public school opens up its facilities after school for general use by community organizations, the First Amendment's free speech provision prevents the school from banning religious groups from participation. The case arose when a New York school refused to allow an evangelical church to use school facilities for a public film series presenting a Christian perspective on family issues, even though the school accepted "social, civic, and recreational meetings and entertainments, and other uses pertaining to the welfare of the community." *Lamb's Chapel* sends the important message to bureaucrats and their attorneys that it is not permissible to single out religious groups for discriminatory treatment in the management of public property.

The overall picture for religious freedom remains clouded, however. Predicting how a justice will vote, as many have recently relearned, is a dicey business. What is certain, however, is that the *Zobrest* Court passed up an ideal opportunity to refashion an establishment jurisprudence that for fifty years has regularly subjugated the institutional and associational aspects of religious freedom to the secularizing project of constructing a wall of separation between religion and government. *Zobrest* will take its place as a modest exception to this general trend, an instance where a Court majority pulled back from the most radical implications of the separationist logic. With the departure of Justice White, though, such exceptions may be rarer.

For the foreseeable future, the Court can be expected to flag the most flagrant assaults on the religious freedom of solitary individuals or small religious groups, as illustrated by the Santeria case. It is less likely that a Court majority will recognize that what it classifies as "establishment" cases implicate religious freedom just as surely as "free exercise" cases. The Court's continued insistence on a rigid separation of religion and government exerts what lawyers call a "chilling effect" on most government efforts to accommodate the religious practices of its citizens and discourages creative experiments with the use of religious organizations to help deliver much-needed social services. Given the pervasive power of the modern regulatory and social welfare state, the continued reign of separationism means that the Court remains a collaborator, witting or unwitting, of the cultural forces bent on secularizing America. FT

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Books In Review

Justice Lite

Political Liberalism. By John Rawls. *Columbia University Press. 401 pp. $29.95.*

Reviewed by **Robert H. Bork**

Americans are justifiably anxious about the stability of their society and its institutions. Almost forty years after *Brown v. Board of Education* and almost thirty after the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965, racial harmony seems as far away as ever. In some sense, the prospects of harmony have even receded. Difficult as white-black relations have been and are, the influx of Hispanics and Asians promises to make the tensions even greater as Americans fight over group entitlements. Radical feminism and the homosexual rights movement are dividing us even further, while the madness of multiculturalism threatens to make our culture a chaos. Public respect for the institutions of government is low and sinking.

John Rawls' latest book, *Political Liberalism,* focuses on the problem of stability in a diverse, democratic, and liberal society. He recognizes that it is impossible that citizens of a free society should agree on comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines. As to such matters, we are, and always will be, divided. What can be hoped for, he thinks, is an overlapping consensus on principles of political justice, on the principles, that is, of a form of constitutional democracy that provides fair terms of social cooperation between citizens who disagree, reasonably, about much else. An air of unreality arises at the outset of his argument, then, because much of what fragments our society is not disagreement about reasonable, comprehensive doctrines but group animosities and fights for material advantage (often phrased in moral terms). Still, as stated in outline, Rawls' endeavor sounds useful.

Unfortunately, but predictably, Rawls approaches his topic not through an examination of American society, its institutions, and its stresses, but through a highly abstract and complex contractarian theory that advances a political agenda whose main appeal will be to persons already of left-liberal persuasion. As he did in his 1971 book, *A Theory of Justice,* Rawls places representatives of citizens behind a "veil of ignorance" in which no one knows what positions the persons represented will occupy when the veil is lifted and life in a real society begins. These representatives, who apparently believe their principals to be highly risk averse, arrive at two principles of political justice:

> a. Each person has an equal claim to a fully adequate scheme of equal basic rights and liberties, which scheme is compatible with the same scheme for all; and in this scheme the equal political liberties, and only those liberties, are to be guaranteed their full value.
> b. Social and economic inequalities are to satisfy two conditions: first, they are to be attached to positions and offices open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity; and second, they are to be to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged members of society.

The first principle seems unexceptionable, at least until it begins to receive more concrete meaning. On its face, however, the second condition of the second principle, which survives from Rawls' previous book, raises a warning signal. What reason is there to believe that people be-

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hind a veil of ignorance would adopt so Draconian an egalitarian stricture? What reason is there to think that justice requires that there be no social or economic inequality unless the least advantaged in the society receive the greatest benefit from that inequality? There are no good reasons, of course, and the tendency of the condition is pernicious. It condemns all actual societies, including that of the United States, by setting a requirement that can never be satisfied. This legitimates, from a left-liberal perspective, a ground for perpetual attacks upon and hostility toward the hierarchies and lines of authority of this society as it is, or even as it may become.

That characteristic of his philosophy aside (which is a little like saying, "Other than that, Mrs. Lincoln, how did you enjoy the play?"), Rawls' argument leaves the world we know for one imaginable only in a seminar. Early on, he tells us: "The aim of justice as fairness, then, is practical: it presents itself as a conception of justice that may be shared by citizens as a basis of a reasoned, informed, and willing political agreement." If that means that citizens are to understand and accept Professor Rawls' reasoning, or even its main outlines, then the possibility of realizing his "practical" aim is zero. For this is an endlessly complex and exceedingly abstruse argument that will be followed only by a few academics working the same line of country.

If Americans did understand Rawls' reasoning, moreover, they would never accept the extremely egalitarian model of political liberalism he offers. His ideal society is utopian and can for that reason only be approached by coercive methods. It is to be feared that such methods are what he has in mind, and that the instrument of coercion is to be the judiciary: "Judges are expected to have a deeper understanding of society's conception of political justice than others, and a greater facility in applying its principles and in reaching reasonable decisions, especially in the more difficult cases." This suspicion is confirmed when he turns to "the basic liberties and their priorities" in relation to the Supreme Court's free speech jurisprudence.

Advocacy of violent revolution is to be protected by the courts unless lawlessness is imminent. This is indeed the way the Supreme Court now reasons; yet if the constitutional regime is just, as Rawls says his is, and if the polls are open, it is impossible to see what value there is to advocacy of violent overthrow of a democratically elected government. To suppress advocacy of revolt, Rawls says, is to suppress advocacy of the reasons given. That, of course, is not true. Socialism, for example, can be advocated without advocating the violent destruction of a democratic regime. Rawls' other tactic is to confuse the danger of advocating violent overthrow of the government—necessarily a minority project—with the advocacy of a policy that might be dangerous if a majority adopted it. But constitutional protection of the latter does not require protection of the former. On the other hand, Rawls has no difficulty justifying the suppression of speech by those having what he regards as disproportionate influence—corporations, wealthy candidates for public office, etc. He also appears to endorse the Supreme Court's one person, one vote decisions without worrying about the fact that those decisions draw on nothing in the Constitution or in our historical political arrangements.

This suggests that Professor Rawls, like his legal academic admirers, is prepared to have judges implement his philosophy whether or not there exists any actual constitutional principle to support it. In the end, therefore, *Political Liberalism* is not merely unworldly and egalitarian beyond reason but contains strong authoritarian elements inappropriate to a constitutional democracy. It is a matter for regret that the book reflects so well much of the current academic mood.

Still Strangers

JEWS IN CHRISTIAN AMERICA: THE PURSUIT OF RELIGIOUS EQUALITY. By NAOMI W. COHEN. *Oxford University Press. 300 pp. $39.95.*

Reviewed by **David G. Dalin**

IN HER meticulously researched new study, Professor Naomi W. Cohen of the Jewish Theological Seminary provides a comprehensive historical analysis of the Jewish quest for religious equality within Christian America, and of the many church-state issues of concern to American Jews from colonial times through the mid-1960s.

The evolving Jewish position on church-state issues in nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century America was shaped, in large part, by the widely held view that America was a "Christian nation" and that Christianity was part of the common law of the land. As early as 1811, Chancellor James Kent, Chief Justice of New York's highest court, in validating a prohibition against blasphemy, stated unequivocally that "we are a Christian people, and the morality of this country is deeply engrafted upon Christianity, and not upon the doctrines or worship of [non-Christian] imposters." The legal argument for this view was perhaps most memorably made by Kent's contemporary, U.S. Supreme Court Justice Joseph Story, whose frequently quoted interpretation of the First Amendment, in his celebrated *Commentaries on the Constitution*, staunchly affirmed that Christianity was part of the common law. As Professor Cohen aptly notes, Story's opinion, which was shared by other prominent American lawyers and jurists who similarly viewed Christianity as a recognized part of the common law, was often cited by nineteenth-century

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Protestant proponents of a Christian commonwealth, who successfully championed legislation to protect the Christian Sabbath and who (unsuccessfully) proposed "Christian Amendments" to write "the Lord Jesus Christ" and the Christian basis of public life into the text of the Constitution.

Nineteenth-century Jewish leaders viewed the laws requiring observance of the Christian Sabbath, in particular, which were sanctioned by the common law and which were so central to the Protestant vision of a Christian America, to be part of a religiously coercive effort to "establish" Christianity as the national religion, while forcing Jews to either desecrate the Jewish Sabbath or endure monetary losses because of their faith. Thus the widespread enactment of Sunday "blue" laws—which required that all businesses close down on the Christian Sabbath and imposed a harsh economic burden on religious Jews who observed their Sabbath on Saturday—became one of the church-state issues that most agitated Jews in the nineteenth century, and remained a central church-state issue well into the twentieth. Professor Cohen's illuminating discussion of the evolving Jewish communal debate on how to most effectively oppose Sunday legislation offers new historical insight and analysis not found in previous studies of the subject.

The Protestant vision of a Christian America that found expression in Story's interpretation of the First Amendment and in such evangelical efforts to enact Sunday laws and to "Christianize" the Constitution gained further legitimacy in 1892 when the Supreme Court, in *Church of the Holy Trinity v. United States*, declared that the United States really was a "Christian nation." Testifying to the increasing respectability of the "Christian nation" idea, Justice David Brewer, who wrote the Court's decision, "reaffirmed that faith—the reasons that made America a Christian nation and the reasons why it should remain one"—in a series of lectures published in 1905.

The publication of Justice Brewer's book, under the title of *The United States—A Christian Nation*, generated vocal and widespread condemnation within the American Jewish community. Professor Cohen has provided the most thorough analysis yet available of the American Jewish response to the "Christian nation" movement, particularly in her discussion of the resurgent church-state debate within the Central Conference of American Rabbis (CCAR), the national organization of the American Reform Rabbinate. The fact that by the time of the Brewer lectures the vast majority of America's common schools, many of whose teachers be-

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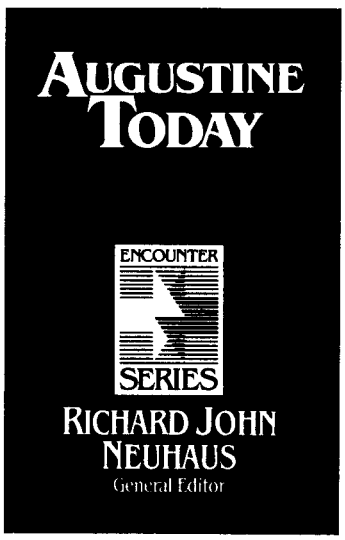

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longed to evangelical churches, encouraged Bible reading and the recitation of the Lord's Prayer as part of their opening exercises gave rise to growing alarm among Reform Jewish leaders. Thus, in 1906, as Cohen points out, the newly created Committee on Church and State of the CCAR was to call for a national campaign of education to "reconquer" American public opinion in support of separationism. In this, the first major public relations campaign by American Jews, the Committee on Church and State produced a widely distributed pamphlet entitled "Why the Bible Should Not Be Read in the Public Schools," and organized a series of protests in various cities. Unchallenged publicly by any other Jewish position on this issue, the CCAR's stand was understood by Christian America to be the only Jewish point of view.

THE SCHOOLS campaign of the CCAR did in fact signal "a new phase in American Jewish responses to the Christian-state idea" and the beginning of an emerging Jewish consensus in opposition to religion in the public schools, or elsewhere in American public life. By the mid-1940s, the vast majority of American Jews, conceiving of religion and public life as being rigidly distinct, had come to embrace strict separationism as the only defense against what they perceived to be a Christian-dominated state. Beginning in 1948, with the landmark Supreme Court case of *McCollum v. Board of Education*, Leo Pfeffer, the staff attorney of the American Jewish Congress and American Jewry's leading apostle of strict separationism, led a new mobilization against Sunday blue laws, prayer and religious instruction in the public schools, public display of religious symbols, state aid to parochial schools, and tax exemptions for churches and synagogues.

Throughout the second half of her book, Cohen devotes considerable (if, at times, uncritical) attention to the legal assumptions, strategy, and tactics of the American Jewish Congress' Commission on Social Action, which in the years between 1945 and 1965 under Pfeffer's direction did so much to shape and further the legal doctrine of strict separationism. For Pfeffer, who successfully argued more church-state cases than anyone else in American history, and the other strict separationist leaders of the American Jewish community, it was axiomatic that any religious influence in the public institutions of Christian America impinged upon the full citizenship of Jews. Pfeffer's view that "complete separation of church and state is best for the church and best for the state, and secures freedom for both" seemed to most American Jews to be logically consistent and historically convincing. When the Supreme Court, in *Engel v. Vitale* (1962) and *Abington Township School District v. Schempp* (1960), outlawed prayers and Bible reading in the public schools, the overwhelming majority of spokesmen for American Jewry applauded the decisions.

And yet, as Professor Cohen observes, the separationist position did not go entirely unchallenged, even in its heyday. During the 1950s and 1960s, several prominent Jewish thinkers and communal leaders, such as Will Herberg and Milton Himmelfarb, began to develop a strong Jewish argument for the desirability of greater religious involvement in American public life. Indeed, one of the great virtues of Professor Cohen's book is the manner in which she documents in much detail the existence of a "counter-tradition" to the prevailing liberal separationist orthodoxy within the American Jewish community. She is in fact the first historian to have provided us with so thoroughly documented an analysis of the emergence, in the 1950s and early 1960s, of this new party of dissenters from the separationist consensus.

PROFESSOR Cohen's discussion of the debate over the *Engel* and *Schempp* Supreme Court rulings is particularly enlightening. It was Will Herberg, then an eminent Jewish theologian, religion editor of *National Review*, and outspoken proponent of government support for parochial schools, who emerged as the most vocal Jewish critic of these Court decisions banning Bible reading and prayer in the public schools. In this Herberg was joined by, among others, Immanuel Jakobovits, the Orthodox rabbi of the prestigious Fifth Avenue Synagogue in New York City and the future Chief Rabbi of England. Jakobovits publicly dissented from the pro-*Engel* position of the New York Board of Rabbis.

But, as Professor Cohen tells us, Jewish opposition to *Schempp* and *Engel* was also, and unanticipatedly, voiced by some more liberal sectors of the Jewish community as well. Seymour Siegel, for example, a Conservative Rabbi and thinker as well as a staunch supporter of the Regents prayer and of state aid to Jewish and Catholic religious schools, attacked the defenders of the "nonexistent wall of separation of church and state" who "brainwashed" the Jewish community, arguing that a secular state and "desacralized" society was alien to both Americanism and Judaism. So, too, for example, Reform Rabbi Herbert Weiner, denouncing "the control and intimidation of the Jewish community by the militant separationists," charged that Jewish organizations were not at liberty "to demand in the name of Judaism that every Jew must rejoice when a nonoffensive prayer is eliminated from the schools" or to call Jewish dissenters disloyal to both Americanism and Judaism.

Professor Cohen has uncovered several other prominent (but, until now, ignored or forgotten) voices of dissent from the prevailing liberal Jewish orthodoxy as well. As she points out, the prayer and Bible reading decisions of the early 1960s "marked the first time that many prominent Jews argued publicly against their own secular organizations and, equally, against separationist rabbis." The first time, but not, of course, the last. The Jewish

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critique of strict separationism would increase and intensify in the decades that followed, significantly transforming the church-state debate within the American Jewish community. It is regrettable, therefore, that Professor Cohen concludes her narrative in 1965 and, except for an all-too-brief six-page "afterword," does not continue her detailed discussion and analysis up to the present.

Thus, for example, while she does note that Jewish organizational consensus in support of separationism "broke down" further during the 1970s over the issue of public support for parochial schools, the growth of Jewish Day Schools and its implications for the debate over state aid to parochial schools are left almost completely unexamined. Prior to the 1960s, government support for private religious schools had been generally seen as a Catholic issue. Between 1965 and the early 1990s, however, the unprecedented expansion of Jewish day-school education in America prompted an increasing number of rabbis, Jewish intellectuals, and communal leaders to rethink their earlier opposition to state aid.

Significant, too, is the increasingly important post-1965 role of the Orthodox Commission on Law and Public Affairs (COLPA) in helping to shape church-state debate and litigation on behalf of Jewish interests. COLPA receives but two brief references from Professor Cohen, and no critical discussion or analysis. Organized during the late 1960s to serve as a counterweight to the American Jewish Congress and other separationist agencies, COLPA has appeared as amicus curia in numerous church-state cases on behalf of the "free exercise" claims of religiously observant Jews and other religious believers. When the post-1965 sequel to Professor Cohen's study is written, one hopes it will contain a detailed discussion and analysis of the seminal contribution of COLPA to the development of a growing body of law relating to the accommodation of religious practices in America, as well as to a new and exciting chapter in the evolving Jewish debate on the relationship between American Jews, Judaism, and American public life.

In the meantime, however, this book remains the standard historical study of the Jewish quest for religious freedom and equality in Christian America.

Was Burke a Conservative?

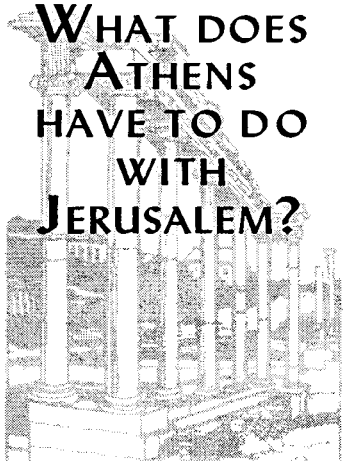
The Great Melody: A Thematic Biography and Commented Anthology of Edmund Burke. By Conor Cruise O'Brien. *University of Chicago Press. 602 pp. $34.95.*

Reviewed by **Mark C. Henrie**

At the corner of Massachusetts Avenue and 11th Street in Washington, D.C., a wandering tourist will find himself standing beneath the gaze of a statue of Edmund Burke, the British parliamentarian and political thinker, who never once set foot on these shores. This is particularly surprising for us today, for we tend to know Burke, when we do, as the father of modern conservatism, while we have come to understand America's founding principles as resolutely liberal and progressive. Why then would a man oftentimes denounced as a reactionary be publicly honored in the capital of a nation founded to be *novus ordo seclorum*?

An answer inevitably leads us into the exceptionally complex and confusing riddle of Burke's political thought. In the 1770s, Burke was an influential advocate of the American cause in the British Parliament. First he argued against taxing the colonies altogether, and then after the fateful breach in 1776 he argued that American independence should be recognized and the war brought swiftly to an end. Indeed, Burke's speech "On Conciliation with the

Mark C. Henrie *is a doctoral candidate in political theory at Harvard University. He is writing his dissertation on "Edmund Burke and the Politics of Counter-Enlightenment."*



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Colonies" used to be a set piece in American high school curricula. Further enhancing his reputation for several generations of Americans was the fact that Burke was a lifelong Whig rather than a Tory. As such, he led efforts in the 1780s for British constitutional reforms which eventually limited the prerogative of the Crown, thereby consolidating parliamentary sovereignty. Through most of his life, Burke can fairly be described as a moderate progressive in the terms of his day.

But from the fall of the Bastille in 1789 until his death in 1797, Burke's writings seem to reveal an increasingly intransigent critic of almost everything we have come to understand as modern in politics, religion, and society. Both publicly and privately he championed counter-revolutionary war, a "long war," until full restoration of the French monarchy could be realized and Jacobinism extirpated. In the process of justifying his antagonism to the Revolution, an antagonism that surprised his fellow Whigs, Burke explored almost every theme that was to become a leitmotif of Anglo-American conservative thought. Continental antiliberals also found his arguments congenial, and a frequently quoted passage from *Reflections on the Revolution in France* illustrates why this should be so. After conjuring a vision of the Queen of France in her youthful glory, Burke waxes indignant at her rude treatment by Revolutionary democrats, and he laments the passing of the ancien régime:

> I thought ten thousand swords must have leaped from their scabbards to avenge even a look that threatened her with insult. But the age of chivalry is gone. That of sophisters, economists, and calculators has succeeded; and the glory of Europe is extinguished forever.

Now the American regime, whose claims Burke had supported in the 1770s, was itself founded on the rejection of just these deferential, feudal values, the passing of which Burke here laments. In the emerging polarization of modern ideologies, those who had cheered Burke's support of the People and Progress in the 1770s now found him on the side of Monarchs and Reaction. Upon reading the *Reflections*, Marie Antoinette reportedly wept, while Thomas Jefferson remarked on the "rottenness of [Burke's] mind," and suggested that only "wicked motives" could explain his political apostasy.

Given the prospect of (at least) "two Burkes," most sympathetic commentators have sought to find a unifying thread by which he can be made consistent. It may be observed, for example, that Whiggery is not identical to liberalism, nor is the American Revolution identical to the French. Burke was a great friend of that arch-Tory, Samuel Johnson, and he never had a good thing to say about democracy nor, with some notable and stinging exceptions, a bad thing to say about hereditary aristocracy. Burke is thus "really" a conservative. On the other hand, the popular and magnanimous sentiments of Burke's early career can be brought to the fore while his response to the Revolution is contextualized into a pragmatic anti-utopianism. In such a perspective, Burke is seen as a critic, not of the French aspiration to achieve such modern political goals as liberty, equality, and fraternity, but only of the Revolution's violence and radical instability. The rest is rhetoric, and Burke is thus "really" a liberal. In his much-praised thick new book, Conor Cruise O'Brien holds an extreme form of this latter view.

The title of O'Brien's "thematic biography" is taken from a line in Yeats' poem "The Seven Sages":

> American colonies, Ireland,
> France and India
> Harried, and Burke's great
> melody against it.

O'Brien variously defines the "it" mentioned in this couplet as "oppression," "unjust authority," "authoritarianism," and "the arrogance of power." In O'Brien's view, opposition to "it" is the central moral motivation of Burke's politics, and if we understand this, we can find the deep consistency in Burke's words and actions.

Key to making this interpretation plausible is O'Brien's ingenious and well-constructed argument that Burke identified much more closely with Irish Catholicism than has previously been acknowledged. Burke's own father had conformed to the Established Church in order to practice law in an Ireland where Catholics suffered under the Penal Laws; Burke's mother remained a Catholic, though she conformed sporadically; Burke married a Catholic. O'Brien further conjectures that as a child Burke was probably educated by a priest and may even have been secretly baptized a Catholic. His cousins, members of the Irish Catholic gentry, were often in jeopardy during the periods of vindictive anti-Catholic agitation that for centuries were a recurring experience in the English-speaking world. And there are some indications that in his twenties, in London, Burke found himself strongly attracted to the faith of his fathers.

Thus O'Brien suggests that Burke may be understood rather like a Marrano Jew: he is not fully converted to his new faith and he feels great sympathy for those he has left behind, but under the restrictive laws of his time and as a public figure, he must cover this sympathy with loud declarations of conventional views. Far from being a convinced defender of the Establishments of the British Constitution, Burke secretly harbors a sense of fundamental injustice in the status quo.

This account allows O'Brien to explain (away) Burke's illiberal defense of civil and ecclesial Establishments as a mere rhetorical means by which Burke could pass as a good Englishman. For O'Brien, the "real" Burke was the consistent advocate of Irish Catholic emancipation—and American freedom, and the rights of the natives of India. He even goes so

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far as to suggest that Burke's antagonism to the French Revolution arose because of the close connection Dr. Richard Price—against whom Burke polemicized in the *Reflections*—drew between the 1688 Revolution, the French Revolution, and Anti-Popery: the rise of Jacobin sympathies in the British Isles could thus ultimately affect the lives of Burke's Irish cousins. Here the plausibility of O'Brien's hermeneutic stretches very thin, and we are driven to reconsider the evidence for the traditional "conservative" interpretation of Burke.

O'Brien's reconstruction of Burke's Catholicism is surely a masterful work of historical speculation, and it is true that we can always detect a spirit of liberality in Burke's writings and speeches. But this does not suffice to demonstrate that Burke is a liberal in any meaningful sense. In fact, the opposite may be true. Having offered us a Catholic Burke, O'Brien remains strangely silent about what this would imply about Burke's relationship with the natural law tradition—that tradition in contradiction to which modern rights theories emerged. Of course much of what we understand to be virtuous in politics and morals was already present in natural law teaching, but on no Catholic theory of the eighteenth century was even so mild a liberalism as Locke's tenable.

Now, Locke would have extended toleration to all but atheists and Catholics, and he seems to have believed that dissenting Protestants made the best (liberal) citizens. Burke likewise had no sympathy whatsoever for atheists, while as we have seen, he personally championed Catholic claims. But significantly, Burke was always hostile to Dissenters. He did virtually nothing to end their disabilities under English law, and he once sarcastically commented, "If mere dissent from the Church of Rome be a merit, he that dissents the most perfectly is the most meritorious. . . . A man is certainly the most perfect Protestant who protests against the whole Christian religion." To support relief for Catholics but not Dissenters seems an unprincipled favoritism to us; O'Brien tries to explain the fact with an intricate account of the political dynamics of the period. But Burke himself argues contra Locke that the dissenting habit of mind is one unfit for civilized society, while Catholic habits of discipline render them excellent civil subjects. Only for this reason does justice demand that they be admitted to the benefits of the Constitution. In short, O'Brien's discovery of Burke's Catholicism may actually support a less liberal reading of his thought than previously could be credited.

Much other evidence could be adduced to demonstrate why it is inappropriate to understand Burke as a liberal—from his remarkable defense of prejudice after a century of enlightened attacks on obscurantism to his recognition of the "presumptive virtue" of hereditary aristocrats. Since O'Brien departs from his usual practice and sharply limits his quotations from the *Reflections* (he notes that this work is widely available, so quotation is unnecessary), this evidence does not appear in his already large volume. But even when O'Brien does offer passages traditionally thought to illustrate Burke's conservatism, his interpretations are awkward. After quoting at length Burke's furious denunciation of Rousseau in the 1791 "Letter to a Member of the National Assembly," for example, O'Brien contents himself with the editorial comment, "Definitely a part of the Great Melody." O'Brien admits to being himself a liberal foe of Jean-Jacques, for there are well-known totalitarian implications to the General Will. But Burke attacks Rousseau for quite different reasons, one of which is Rousseau's belief that there are no moral obligations which are involuntary or unchosen—something that Rousseau holds in common with all mainstream liberal thought. For Burke, certain obligations are prior to any choice, and these obligations arise from the historical role into which the individual finds himself thrown by Providence. Burke shares this view with many contemporary communitarians and with all major conservative antiliberals. It is an antiliberal view. Too often it is forgotten that the *Reflections* was a prophetic work precisely because its hot rhetoric was written against the early, liberal phase of the Revolution, long before the advent of the Terror.

O'Brien concludes his book with an appendix containing a correspondence with Sir Isaiah Berlin over the question of Burke's relationship to the "reactionaries," among whom Berlin numbers Justus Möser, Joseph de Maistre, and T. S. Eliot. O'Brien objects to Berlin's inclusion of Burke in such a group, and this exchange illuminates his political agenda. For while O'Brien's book is certainly a (largely successful) attempt to save Burke's importance

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from the dismissive histories of Sir Lewis Namier and his students, it is also an effort to wrest Burke's political thought from contemporary "Burkean conservatives," whom O'Brien simply equates with neanderthal McCarthyite Cold Warriors. It is because O'Brien has such a low opinion of conservatives that he believes that having shown Burke to have had humane sentiments and to have often opposed Yeats' "it," he has thereby wholly discredited the notion that Burke is one of them. It seems not to occur to him that few conservatives think of themselves as being proponents of "oppression," "unjust authority," "authoritarianism," and "the arrogance of power."

Fundamentally, O'Brien's judgment is clouded by his equation of "liberalism" with every good thing in politics and morals. This common liberal presumption obscures both the highly reductive nature of liberalism and the panoply of human goods that lies beyond liberalism's purview. Conservatives like Edmund Burke are identified in part by their less narrow—indeed, their more liberal—understanding of what constitutes the common good.

The Ultra-Orthodox

PIETY AND POWER: THE WORLD OF JEWISH FUNDAMENTALISM. By DAVID LANDAU. *Hill & Wang/FSG. $27.50. 334 pp.*

Reviewed by **Mark Miller**

IN 1988, when the ultra-Orthodox parties won a telling percentage of the vote in the Israeli election, many secular Jews found themselves forced for the first time to reckon with an Orthodoxy that was both politically aggressive and self-confident—and as alien as the shtetls of Old Europe. This was true not only for Israel but for Jewry in the United States, and tensions rose quickly. The "haredim" (*tremblers*), as the ultra-Orthodox are known, had over the years, culminating in 1990, consolidated their place not just in the imaginations—or, if you will, the fears—of their fellow Jews around the world, but in the Israeli electoral process as well. The support of the haredim was instrumental in Yitzhak Shamir's victory and earned for them the reputation of being the swing power in Israeli parliamentary politics.

A crisis pitch was reached with the "Who is a Jew" controversy—a struggle over whose authority would determine true Jewish identity. Its ostensible significance was connected to the question of who had the right to emigrate to Israel under the Law of Return, but, of course, its real significance lay deeper. The number of people who would be affected by any changes in the law of return was insignificant, but the issue itself cut to the very heart of what constitutes Jewishness and Jewish authority. In their political challenge, the haredim sent an unmistakable message to the secular world that they were determined to influence the Jewish future.

IN *Piety and Power*, the English-born journalist David Landau proposes, as it were, to describe the mind of haredi Judaism. He examines the "vigorous resurgence of haredi Orthodoxy, in Israel and in the Diaspora," and finds there a "single-minded militancy" that "believes in its divine right to win souls" and now "[sets] the tone in Orthodoxy." He soon jettisons this apocalyptic tone, however, and provides a not unsympathetic examination of haredi communities in Israel, America, and Britain, and of how modern economic and demographic realities are having some degree of influence on the world of the ultra-Orthodox.

Understanding the haredi entry into the rough and tumble of Israeli politics depends on a prior understanding of the nature of rabbinic authority—something that Landau tendentiously calls "blind obeisance." Jewish communities have always depended on legal authorities, who have, moreover, been considered part of an unbroken thread connecting the communities with the revelation on Mount Sinai. Among today's haredim that authority has been extended beyond strictly legal questions and into a variety of other matters. In Jerusalem, for instance, some haredi rabbis dispense not only medical advice to their followers, but prescriptions as well, which certain local pharmacies will happily fill.

But nowhere is the extent of rabbinical authority as intensely on display as in the hasidic "tisch," a gathering of the rabbi's followers, who come to watch him eat his highly ritualized Sabbath eve meal and listen to his discourses on the Torah. In some hasidic sects, a large part of the experience is scrambling to secure a token share of the food distributed from the rebbe's plate—something rather startling for the uninitiated to watch. The rebbe may be considered the living embodiment of Torah principles, but the passion to eat from his plate seems to suggest that many consider him to be far more than that—a dispenser of holiness.

Such hasidic enthusiasm may be a small part of the haredi world, but it points to the kind of sectarian loyalty that has been transferred into politics. On this basis, the spiritual leaders of the two main haredi parties—Eliezer Shach of the Ashkenazic Degel HaTorah (Flag of the Torah) party and Ovadia Yosef of the Sephardic Shas party—control voting blocs of unparalleled cohesion.

In Landau's view, far from elevating the tone of Israeli political discourse, the rabbis have themselves been dragged down to the level of politics. Landau himself doesn't explicitly discuss the possible contradictions between political figuredom and the demands of rabbinic law, but he does tell anecdotes that illustrate them. Political name-calling, for instance, seems startlingly unrabbinic, not to mention hypocritical—which is how many Israelis see it.

BE THAT AS IT MAY, the political empowerment of the ultra-Orthodox is

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bringing change both to the haredi and to the secular societies of Israel in very tangible ways. The granting of military exemption for yeshiva students, for example, has at one and the same time generated an enormous resentment on the part of secular society and led to a mushrooming of yeshivas. This in turn has had certain consequences for the haredi economy. For the dean of a yeshiva to reject a student, no matter what his qualifications, means pushing him out of the haredi community and into a world of dangers both physical and spiritual. Hundreds of students are therefore being admitted to yeshivas who, in a market economy, would be entering the labor market.

Furthermore, the assumption that they will be in a yeshiva in most cases eliminates the pressure on young men to enter the work force, even after marriage. (Husbands are often supported by their wives or in-laws.) Multiply that by the highest birth rate in Israel, and it adds up to a recipe for cyclical poverty and the kind of reliance upon community assistance warned against by, among others, the great sage Maimonides.

Landau handles his material like the seasoned journalist that he is, which is to say unevenly and with occasional displays of bias. He is most interesting when digging into the fast-growing and little-talked-about Sephardic haredi communities, their colorful mystics, and mystical charlatans. He is at his worst when struggling to lend journalistic color to traditions better left to speak for themselves. (Gefilte fish he ridiculously labels the "pride of traditional Eastern European cuisine"; potato kugel is the "quintessentially Eastern European culinary delight," representing the "gastronomic climax of the [tisch].")

In Landau's portrayal, then, the haredim inhabit a "Fiddler on the Roof" world which, in its rigidity and self-righteousness, has little claim over the Jewish future—which may indeed be responsible for triggering an outright schism. But Jewish law isn't, so to speak, written in stone. It has a flexibility that allows it to evolve, however slowly. Which is perhaps why the haredim are chafing ever more intensely against the secular world: they are coming to speak its language. One need look no further than 770 Eastern Parkway in Brooklyn's Crown Heights to see a Lubavitch hasidic movement with, among other things, worldwide hotlines, telethons, 800-numbers, and audio and video productions, all controlled by an increasingly sophisticated group of press handlers constantly reaching out to major media outlets. But most of all, the haredim are hitting secular Judaism where it lives, in the politics of the Jewish state.

The haredim understand the modern world more than detractors realize, and this will be at the core of their successes to come, both political and spiritual. For the haredim have not only the modern world at their disposal, but the ancient one as well, and that is an advantage the secular world ignores at its peril.

The Origins of Morality

THE MORAL SENSE. By JAMES Q. WILSON. *Free Press. 300 pp. $22.95.*

***Reviewed by* Gilbert Meilaender**

WE READ BOOKS and recommend them for many different reasons. Some are tightly constructed, theoretically persuasive works; others may be conceptually more confusing, yet very rich in their individual parts. James Wilson has, it seems to me, written the second sort of book. Any chapter will stimulate thought and suggest directions for further study, reading, and reflection. Yet, I confess, I am hard pressed to say what the book as a whole is about.

The structure of the book is, on the face of it, quite simple. After an opening chapter discussing what he means by a "moral sense," Wilson has chapters discussing in anthropological and ethnographic detail four such sentiments: sympathy, fairness, self-control, and duty. There follow four chapters discussing the sources of these sentiments in our natural sociability, in the family structure, and in the differentiation of gender—and the process by which in the West these sentiments have moved from an application within local communities to larger, potentially universal, communities. A concluding chapter seeks to outline the implications of the work for the development of character in our own time and place.

Wilson begins with his belief that we have lost confidence in our ability to make moral judgments. This loss of confidence stems in part, it appears, from the moral relativism of our time; hence, Wilson suggests that the "moral sense" offers an understanding of human nature in

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which certain dispositions (though not many moral rules) are universal. The loss of confidence also stems, he suggests, from our tendency to assume that human beings are entirely self-interested, living in a Hobbesian world; hence, Wilson contends that the "moral sense" uncovers "the tug of our better nature." These are somewhat different moves, but in either case Wilson wants to argue that "most of us have moral sense, but that some of us have tried to talk ourselves out of it."

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HERE, AS OFTEN throughout the book, one isn't quite sure how to react to the argument. Shall I, reassured that certain moral sentiments are built into human nature, worry less about what might seem to be declining mores—confident that the universally shared moral sense will reassert itself? That would, for Wilson, be too simple a response, since it would assume that nature is everything and culture is nothing. He describes the correct attitude as follows: "We have a moral sense, most people instinctively rely on it even if intellectuals deny it, but it is not always and in every aspect of life strong enough to withstand a persuasive and sustained attack." Thus, we should worry about the degradations of our cultural life but not without some confidence that nature cannot entirely be denied its role in shaping morality.

At the heart of Wilson's concern is the family. Indeed, he describes his book as "in part an effort to explain the apparently irrational attachment of family members and to draw from those attachments the argument that they rest on a moral sense and a sketch of the way in which that sense develops." Our moral sentiments of sympathy, fairness, self-control, and conscientiousness are formed in the relation with our parents. Given what Wilson describes as our natural sociability, these sentiments are innate; however, they appear and are developed only within "the routine intimacies of family life."

Wilson's discussion is not without its puzzling features. Because he wants to emphasize that the child is not simply a tabula rasa but is innately disposed to learn to make moral judgments, Wilson appeals strongly to evidence such as studies of identical twins who have been reared apart or of children raised in adoptive families. This evidence, he himself says, "casts doubt on just how much of a difference the family makes in forming the child's character." Yet, nature is not everything, nurture plays its part, and Wilson immediately turns to a discussion of parent-child bonding.

IF SOME readers find themselves confused about Wilson's overarching conceptual claims here, this does not make his discussion any less interesting in its details. Thus, for example, he offers a very engaging discussion of the reasons why a child who learns to be obedient is likely to grow into a self-reliant adult. "The notion that one cannot become an independent, self-assertive adult unless one was allowed to be an independent, self-assertive child is an intellectual fad that careful research has all but destroyed."

If within the family our moral sense is developed and we acquire sentiments such as sympathy and fairness, why is it that these sentiments are not displayed only toward family members—or, at least, within some kin or ethnic grouping? How is it that we acquire what Wilson terms "the universal aspiration"? Wilson himself calls the expansion of range of our moral sense both "remarkable" and "astonishing," and he notes that it has not happened in all cultures. Nor does he regard it as natural, and therefore it is a little peculiar to find this aspiration treated as one of the sources of the moral sentiments. Whatever it is, it does not seem to be that. This aspiration reaches its climax in the Enlightenment, but not without centuries of preparation—which gave rise to a sense of individualism fostered by the expansion of commerce and travel, growth of property rights, and the development (at the Church's urging) of a marriage bond founded in consent of the partners. The result was an Enlightenment legacy to us which, however ambiguous in certain respects, offered the possibility of a universal morality not grounded in particular religious beliefs.

In many of these particulars Wilson's discussion is interesting, provocative, and an important contribution to contemporary debates. Yet it is not a satisfactory theory of the moral life. Part of the confusion is in what Wilson means by the moral sense. He speaks of it sometimes in the singular and other times in the plural (moral senses).

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He describes it as "an intuitive or directly felt belief about how one ought to act," as an innate capacity to become a being who makes moral judgments, as a set of habits that suit us for society and that most of us find pleasing, as feelings, as dispositions—and more. He describes his work as a continuation of that begun in the eighteenth century by Hutcheson, Hume, Butler, and Smith. Yet, it is far from clear that they were all doing the same thing. To be sure, there is some common ground. Moral-sense theorists were trying to ground morality in human nature itself without any appeal to God, and they tended (in contrast to Hobbes) to regard human beings as naturally sociable. Perhaps that is enough similarity to establish Wilson as their successor.

If the theoretical underpinnings are a bit obscure, so is the vision of the moral life that emerges. Our moral sentiments may—given proper training—become moral habits, and our character will be the ensemble of those habits. But the moral sentiments may, according to Wilson, give rise to many different habits of behavior—and, hence, there must be different and incompatible visions of the good life. Good character requires "balance" among competing habits of behavior, and this, Wilson finally suggests, is "more an aesthetic than a philosophical matter"—a surprising conclusion from one who has throughout been critical of Richard Rorty's understanding of the moral life.

This book, so rich in detail, will stimulate and provoke reflection on countless matters. As an ambitious theory of the moral life, however, it finally falls short of what the author apparently intended. That said, *The Moral Sense* is a book very much worth reading. One hopes that it will have the bracing effect of encouraging the timorous to recognize the necessity and possibility of moral judgment in a culture dangerously bent upon denying both.

BRIEFLY NOTED

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, JONATHAN EDWARDS, AND THE REPRESENTATION OF AMERICAN CULTURE. Edited by BARBARA B. OBERG and HARRY S. STOUT. *Oxford University Press. 230 pp. $35.*

Benjamin Franklin and Jonathan Edwards have frequently been studied as competing character types in American culture: with Franklin embodying the secular Yankee attributes of utilitarian worldliness and virtue, and Edwards representing the Puritan strain of evangelical piety and faith. In this collection of provocative essays, the two men emerge, as the editors put it, "as contrapuntal themes in a larger unity," less as simple contradictions within the national character than as clarifications of "the similarities *and* the differences existing in creative tension." The Franklin/Edwards comparison is conducted in three broad areas: Mind (i.e., questions of truth, the affections, and human nature), Culture (including topics such as humor, love, women, virtue, and self-promotion), and Language (rhetoric and style). Of more than passing interest to students of culture and the role of religion in public life, as well as to Americanists.

APPLE OF GOLD: CONSTITUTIONALISM IN ISRAEL AND THE UNITED STATES. By GARY JACOBSOHN. *Princeton University Press. 284 pp. price $39.50.*

A comparison of the constitutions of Israel and the United States highlighting the differences between Israeli communitarianism and American individualism. Laws that would be unthinkable under the U.S. Constitution because they discriminate on the basis of religion or ethnicity—albeit for the common good—are taken for granted in Israel. A 1962 law, for instance, forbids the raising of pigs by Jews and Muslims, but does not apply to Christians. Conversely, Israelis would regard as strange and unhealthy some of the libertarian aspects of Ameri-

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STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION

1A. Title of publication; FIRST THINGS.

1B. Publication No. 005476.

2. Date of Filing: Sept. 16, 1993.

3. Frequency of Issue: Monthly except combined issues June/July and August/September.

3A. No. of Issues Published Annually: 10.

3B. Annual Subscription Price: $24.

4. Mailing Address of Known Office of Publication: 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.

5. Mailing Address of the Headquarters of General Business Offices of the Publisher: 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.

6. Names and Complete Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor. Publisher: Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002. Editor-in-Chief: Richard John Neuhaus. Editor: James Nuechterlein. Managing Editor: Matthew Berke, Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.

7. Owner: Institute on Religion and Public Life, 156 Fifth Avenue, Suite 400, New York, NY 10010-7002.

8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages, or Other Securities: None.

9. The Purpose, Function, and Nonprofit Status of This Organization and the Exempt Statue for Federal Income Tax Purposes Has Not Changed During the Preceding 12 Months.

10. Extent and Nature of Circulation:	Avg. No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual No. Copies of Single Issue Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies (Net Press Run)	22,987	25,875
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors, and Counter Sales	771	2,660
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THE PUBLIC SQUARE

A Continuing Survey of Religion and Public Life

Richard John Neuhaus

Speaking for the Common Good

Receiving no attention that we noticed in the general press, and slight attention in the church press, was a statement issued in June that is titled "The Common Good: Old Idea, New Urgency." It deserves some attention. It was issued by the general secretaries of three organizations, the United States Catholic Conference (USCC), the National Council of Churches (NCC), and the Synagogue Council of America. The release says that these organizations "represent some 100 million American Christians and Jews." The term "represent" is used very loosely in this connection.

The statement no doubt does represent the thinking of the three executives, in close consultation with their respective staffs. The document comes out of a project of the three organizations to help reform welfare policy, for which the Ford Foundation gave them $152,000 to get started. On the basis of our inquiries, it appears that no invitation was extended to evangelical Protestants to join in this endeavor. It might have been appropriate, for example, to include the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE). It would also have been an ecumenical step forward, and the NCC and USCC do profess to be very ecumenical. Indeed, being ecumenical is the reason for the NCC's existence. Obviously, the "inclusivity" so adamantly championed in these circles has its definite limits.

Perhaps it was thought that including the NAE would destroy the conventional symmetry of Protestant-Catholic-Jew by having two Protestant institutions involved. Or maybe the USCC thought that involving the evangelicals would put too much of a strain on the desired consensus—although, as it is, the Catholics agreed to the statement's non-mention of what are, formally at least, top priorities for the USCC, abortion and educational choice. The more probable explanation is that there is what sociologists call an elective affinity between the USCC and NCC. With respect to public policy, and especially social policy, both are left of center on the political spectrum, the NCC somewhat more so than the USCC. As for the Synagogue Council, it is a broad but thin association, making it the logical Jewish partner in the project at hand.

At many points "The Common Good" is unexceptionable, often verging on the vapid. There are also judgments that seem quite sound, on occasion surprisingly so. Admittedly, it is difficult to understand how the USCC believes it can address the common good without reference to the most fevered moral questions in our public life, such as abortion and euthanasia. By issuing what purports to be a comprehensive statement on the common good without mentioning abortion, the USCC invites the inference that abortion is not nearly so central to Catholic social concern as is commonly claimed. Silence does not necessarily connote consent to the pro-abortion sentiments of one's partners in this project, but it surely does indicate the price that one is prepared to pay—the truth one is prepared to neglect—for the sake of consensus.

What They Seek

"We seek," declares the manifesto, "to articulate a fresh and empowering vision of the common good, a vision which inspires public action to meet the basic human needs of all our sisters and brothers." Some readers may find neither the language nor the idea very fresh. The notion that public action, meaning government action, can meet undefined and limitless "basic human needs" will strike most readers as highly improbable. It does seem strange for religious institutions to imply that public action can meet such basic human needs as love, community, and purpose in life. The statement does not exactly say that, but at points it comes pretty close to what Mrs. Clinton has promoted as "the politics of meaning," which some of us take to be the idolatry of politics.

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"We judge this moment especially to be filled with great promise for a renewal of the national bond," say the signers, and they speak of this moment being marked by "the return of our national confidence." It is hard to know what such expressions mean, but there is nothing in the track record of the organizations involved and little in the statement itself that discourages the assumption that they are referring to the election of Mr. Clinton. Perhaps not, but one wonders what else has happened recently that might suggest to the liberal mind that we are experiencing "the return of our national confidence." At the risk of mentioning the obvious, most Americans seemed to think that the Reagan-Bush years were, all in all, a time of national confidence. Maybe excessive confidence. At any rate, Reagan and Bush were elected with a much larger share of the vote than the 42.7 percent received by Clinton. The election was hardly the popular mandate for change that President Clinton and, apparently, the signers of the present statement take it to be.

After indicating the general drift of social policy that they favor—based upon "economic and social rights"—the signers declare, "We believe men and women of good will throughout the country share this vision of a holistic approach to social welfare as a matter of human rights as well as human need." Thus are those who disagree put on notice that their disagreement is a moral failing that puts them outside the circle of people of good will. The statement is frequently misleading in its description of our problems. For instance: "At least 10 million adults remain unemployed. In the past decade, 'homelessness' has become the fate of perhaps a million or more Americans, including tens of thousands of families."

The official figure is less than seven million unemployed, a very large part being people who are momentarily not working because they quit a job in order to find a better job. Maybe the statement intends to include young males and single mothers in the urban underclass who are not looking for jobs at all. As for the "homeless," no note is taken of the fact that the overwhelming majority of street people are alcoholics, drug addicts, or mentally ill. Nor does the statement recognize that the "homeless" phenomenon is in very large part the result of government policy that "deinstitutionalized" the mentally ill and put them on the streets. Concern for the people on the streets is certainly in order, but such concern will be disordered in action if it is based upon the misleading analysis offered here.

This country, which hardly seems to be experiencing a return of national confidence, has innumerable problems, many of which are mentioned in the statement. But the partisan diagnosis and prescriptions offered in "The Common Good" are not likely to meet with common assent. There are too many people of good will who are too well-informed on debates about social policy over the last quarter-century. The signers of the statement are no doubt sincere when they assert, "Our agenda derives from the values inherent within our faiths, not from any partisan political positions." People can believe that when they live and work in a world of like-minded folk where shared political prejudices are so taken for granted that they are not recognized as partisan.

Mediating Institutions

As mentioned, there are also welcome surprises. Two in particular should be noted. The document says, "Making common appeal to the biblical foundation of creation, covenant, and community, we offer a provisional public theology of the common good, whose moral core is social justice, human dignity, and human rights." It is a suggestive statement but, unfortunately, it just stands there without any development. Nonetheless, and while it is not new, the idea of a public theology—or, as we would prefer, a theological grounding for a public philosophy—is worthy of attention. Perhaps the Ford Foundation could be interested in funding a project on that, and one hopes such a project would include also Christians and Jews who are not quite so certain about the public policies inherent in a public theology.

Second and most welcome, the statement offers a firm affirmation of the limits of government and the importance of "mediating institutions" in social policy. To be sure, the affirmation does not accord with other parts of the statement, but it is there. "Government must always seek the general welfare of the people and pursue the common good. But government alone cannot address so large a question. . . . Government programs must supplement and undergird but not supplant the efforts of individuals and families to participate fully in the social, cultural, and economic life of our land." The statement calls for a policy of "empowerment" built upon "mediating institutions [that] often exercise far more creativity and effectiveness than distant bureaucracies and impersonal agencies."

That, one risks immodesty in pointing out, is the direction proposed by Peter Berger and this writer in *To Empower People: The Role of Mediating Structures in Public Policy* (1977). The proposal was entertained by the Carter administration, praised by the Reagan administration, and officially embraced by the Bush administration. Regrettably, Mr. Bush demonstrated little political energy in acting upon the "thousand points of light" that he rhetorically celebrated. While the "New Democrat" of the Clinton campaign employed "communitarian" language and spoke about the importance of voluntarism and mediating institutions, Mr. Clinton

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in the White House has to date given no indication that he will advance such a program of empowerment.

On the contrary, his rhetoric, his appointments, and his policy proposals are more consistent with the statist assumption that government programs can and should, in the words of the statement, "meet the basic human needs of all our sisters and brothers." We have severe reservations about political lobbying by religious organizations, but, since they are in the lobbying business, we hope the signers of "The Common Good" will press the administration on empowerment and mediating institutions—assuming that, despite other parts of the statement, they mean what they say on the subject.

The "Religious Community"

The media are frequently and rightly criticized for neglecting religion and the part it plays in our public life. But their ignoring the appearance of "The Common Good" is understandable. With the exceptions noted, it is a restatement of the well-known positions of well-known organizations. To the task of advancing the policies that they propose, the signers say that "the religious community brings strong values. . . . Moreover we bring 100 million adherents who are both people of faith and participants in this democracy." Values surely, but any journalist worth his ink knows that the signers and their organizations do not bring 100 million people to the task that they propose. The organizations that belong to the organizations involved may count 100 million members, but that is entirely another matter. A great many of the "adherents" alluded to have never heard of the USCC, the NCC, or the Synagogue Council, and could not care less about their pronouncements on public policy. This is even more the case with a pronouncement issued in the name of three executives and not formally endorsed by their organizations.

Finally, and this brings us back to the initial point about ecumenism, the statement reflects a most peculiar view of who is "the religious community" in this country. If we count the number of people who say that they believe in God and who go to church or synagogue with some frequency, there are probably 200 million or more members of "the religious community." It is at least unseemly for the signers of this statement to suggest—although perhaps they do so inadvertently—that the religious community is limited to the members of the organizations connected with their organizations.

The larger reality is that there is, of course, no such thing as "the religious community." There are hundreds of thousands of local communities related to other local communities (all community being local) in ways as diverse as the informal connections between independent Baptists, the ecclesial communion shared by Roman Catholics, and the network of associations commanded by Orthodox rebbes. They almost all no doubt contribute to the common good in their way, maybe even in God's way. That is a truth affirmed, when it is not undermined, by "The Common Good: Old Idea, New Urgency."

FT

MARTYRS, CORRECT AND INCORRECT

There is little disputing the fact that this, above all others, has been the century of Christian martyrdom. Yet that reality receives curiously little attention among contemporary Christians. Presbyterian writer Herbert Schlossberg has recently discussed this phenomenon in *A Fragrance of Oppression: The Church and Its Persecutors*, and offers some suggestive ideas about this strange neglect. Additional dynamics, one suspects, are in play. For instance, in theologies of past decades the prophetic, the radical, and the liberationist all came in for great attention. Priests and nuns killed for their involvement in various social justice struggles in Latin America have received a great deal of attention. But there seems to be an ideological test for the veneration of martyrs.

Those killed under Hitler, notably Dietrich Bonhoeffer, are celebrated. It is respectable, indeed required, to be anti-Nazi. But for forty-plus years anticommunism was suspect, and of course many more Christians were killed by the Communists for being Christians than by the Nazis. The undeniable fact is that during the Cold War those in the West who raised the question of the persecution of Christians behind the Iron Curtain were viewed as reactionary. Unlike, say, the Jesuits of El Salvador who were struggling for a revolutionary new order, the Christians massacred by the Communists were resisting what presented itself as the revolutionary new order. They failed the test of being progressive martyrs. The twentieth-century martyrology, such as it is, is a canon of the politically correct. There are martyrs, and then there are "politically interesting" martyrs.

There is a certain sniffing condescension toward those who simply died for the faith, without some further and redeeming political merit. The innumerable martyrs buried under the snows of Siberia have gone largely unremarked, at least among Christians in the West. And today not much

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notice is paid the brutally persecuted Christians in the south of the Sudan, or the Copts in Egypt. Millions of Christians are involved in just these two instances, and they are under attack because they are Christians. Scholars who attend to the statistics of world Christianity tell us that some 300,000 Christians each year are killed for being Christians. We are not quite sure how they arrive at that figure, but there is no doubt that attention to martyrdom in this century has been and continues to be highly selective.

China is a case in point. Since the Maoist revolution, thousands upon thousands of Christians—including unnumbered priests, ministers, and bishops—have been executed or died in concentration camps. Among Catholics, there is today an official church and an underground church, with the latter insisting upon its communion with Peter, the bishop of Rome. The aforementioned sniffing condescension is evident in a paper recently delivered by Father Robert J. Schreiter in which it is suggested that the Catholic martyrs of China died for "a secondary truth," namely, communion with Rome. The implication is that they were impossibly reactionary pre-Vatican II style Catholics who, had they not been so inflexible, might not have had such a hard time of it.

That contention is sharply challenged by Father Joseph Zen Er-jwun, a Hong Kong theologian now teaching in Shanghai. Fr. Er-jwun argues that it is not for us to judge, by the criteria of theologies now fashionable, the martyrs' quality of faith. "For them," he says, "the question of loyalty to the Roman pontiff was not a question of understanding the church [according to current ecclesiologies] but of believing in the church according to the only understanding available to them."

Fr. Er-jwun writes: "The primacy of the pope is such an integral part of our faith. When that was being attacked there was no question of whether this was a primary or secondary truth. It was the choice between giving to God what belongs to God and to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, or giving in completely to Caesar. Remember John the Baptist. He said, 'It is not allowed,' and paid with his head. Yet you may say that he was overreacting on something which might be qualified as a minor matter of private morality in an Oriental palace. Please don't tell the underground faithful that they made a big fuss about a secondary truth: Bishops and priests died in prison for a secondary truth, religious men and women suffered every kind of persecution and humiliation for a secondary truth, young Catholic lay men and women entered prison and labor camps in their twenties and come out in their fifties only as second-class citizens—and this for secondary truth."

Fr. Er-jwun notes that some years ago at an ecumenical gathering in Montreal the official delegates from China were congratulated by Western Christians for collaborating with the regime by breaking their connection with Rome. Here was a bizarre instance of Westerners not only not supporting the martyrs but cheering on those who had surrendered to Caesar. Fr. Er-jwun's argument is applicable to Catholics, Protestants, and Orthodox alike. Those who choose death and suffering rather than compromising the faith as they understand it are to be revered. We must not impose an ideological test or judge them by what Fr. Er-jwun calls "our sophisticated theological categories, our advanced way of understanding the faith." The timidity of Western Christians in resisting the idols of our time gives little ground for assuming our spiritual superiority. To the contrary, this century's millions of martyrs put to shame our conceits. And that probably goes a long way toward explaining our embarrassed silence about the martyrs.

FT

A Noteworthy Exception

Canards that have been around for a long time begin to smell. Particularly malodorous is the issue of *Response*, the publication of the Simon Wiesenthal Center, that repeats the outrageous charge that Pope Pius XII was indifferent to the crimes of Hitler, notably the extermination of Jews. "From the outset of the conflict," says *Response*, "Pope Pius XII sat on the throne of St. Peter in stony silence, as the trains carrying millions of unsuspecting victims criss-crossed Europe en route to the gas chambers." You get the general tone. It is basically a replay of Rolf Hochhuth's discredited allegations in his 1963 play *The Deputy*. The article's point is to protest the fact that Pius XII, along with thousands of others, is being considered for canonization as a saint.

The article claims that its allegations against Pius XII are supported by "the overwhelming body of scholarly evidence from Jewish and non-Jewish sources." That, too, is nonsense. Numerous scholarly studies, recently that of Anglican priest and Cambridge historian Owen Chadwick (*Britain and the Vatican During the Second World War*), have demonstrated that Pius was intensively involved in opposing Hitler and all he represented, going so far as to encourage tyrannicide. Whether Pius did everything he might have done or should have done during World War II we do not know, and we certainly do not know whether he was a saint. But that these stale and discredited charges come from a source such as the Simon Weisenthal Center is, to

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put it delicately, disappointing.

Also disappointing is that *Response* enlists a Catholic theologian, Harry James Cargas, to support the claim that the possible canonization of Pius is part of a Vatican plot "to appropriate the Holocaust to itself." Cited as supportive evidence is the canonization of Father Maximilian Kolbe and the beatification of Edith Stein, a Jewish convert to Catholicism who was also killed in the Holocaust. The implication is that the Holocaust has not horror enough to be shared, and Catholics are butting into a uniquely Jewish act. The *Response* article and its implications are somewhere between unseemly and obscene. Relations between Jews and Christians are enhanced by a measure of mutual respect that allows each community to honor its dead as it deems fit. Happily, such mutual respect is increasingly the pattern today. The *Response* article is noteworthy for being an exception.

FT

A TYPOLOGY OF EVANGELICALISM

Kenneth Offner works with Intervarsity Christian fellowship at Harvard. He has his work cut out for him. But recently he's been wondering whether evangelicalism is up to the task. In his newsletter he says he finds himself enjoying FIRST THINGS ever so much more than *Christianity Today*, and is intensely interested in books from Ignatius Press while having zero interest in the Top Ten Evangelical Books of the Month. Is Offner on his way to Rome or Eastern Orthodoxy? Not necessarily, but he thinks American evangelicalism is in deep detritus. "We are drifting so far from our Reformational roots that were Luther or Calvin to appear today they might see more things they recognized in Catholicism than in evangelicalism. (Which is not to imply that they would become Catholics!)"

Offner includes his own taxonomy of what is meant by evangelicalism today. It is a question often asked. Most students of the subject come up with at least three criteria that define evangelicalism: belief in absolute authority of Scripture, a born again experience, an eagerness to evangelize others. But Offner says there are twelve different evangelicalisms, although not all of them have a brand name. Here they are, followed by the themes that characterize them. (1) Reformed Evangelicalism—thinking Christianly, transforming culture, changing institutions, opposed to dualism. (2) Anabaptist Evangelicalism—community, countercultural, pacifist, servanthood vs. authority. (3) Neo-Orthodox Evangelicalism—knowing God vs. knowing about God, narrative theology vs. propositional theology. (4) Charismatic Evangelicalism—expecting Signs and Wonders, personal experience, God speaks afresh today. (5) Theonomist Evangelicalism—God's unchanging law, salvation as God's lordship, postmillennial, America as Christian country. (6) Fundamentalist Evangelicalism—antiliberal, biblicist, seriousness of (external) sin, everything is black and white. (7) Dispensationalist Evangelicalism—nondenominational, pro-Israel, grace vs. works. (8) Pro-American Pietist Evangelicalism—America as Christian country, civil religion, personal piety, power of politics. (9) Anti-American and Anti-Pietist Evangelicalism—sinfulness of capitalism, anti-rules, anti-Right, anti-Fundamentalist, freedom is what counts. (10) Therapeutic Evangelicalism—inner healing, sin as sickness, evil as dysfunction, self-knowledge. (11) Social Action Evangelicalism—priority of the poor, physical-spiritual unity, works vs. faith. (12) Liturgical/Sacramental Evangelicalism—tradition, sacraments, ordered worship, respect for the mystical.

Offner goes on to say that only the last is Trinitarian, the others focusing almost exclusively on the Father or the Son (with the Reformed including both Father and Son). And now we expect cries of protest from our many evangelical readers who will say—and they are probably right—that they don't find themselves described in any one of the above. In truth, Offner paints with broad strokes, and much of contemporary evangelicalism laps over into two or more of the categories suggested. Yet there is undeniable utility in trying to get somewhat more specific about what is meant by evangelical. The inevitable price to be paid is that it becomes less possible to speak univocally about "American evangelicalism."

FT

VISITING THE INTENSIVE CARE UNIT

As one who recently lay gravely ill on the sick bed for months, this writer has become adept at distinguishing between those who are really comfortable around sick people and those who aren't. We were for years among those who were not, but the hunch is that that has changed as a result of the recent illness. In any case, this is but a way of

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introducing the point that it is again time for us to visit our sick friend, the National Council of Churches.

The prognosis is grim. General Secretary Joan Brown Campbell puts a brave face on things. She says the NCC is "not coming apart at the seams," but it is "groaning" and there is a chance of recovery. Recovery in this instance is called "transformation," and the NCC has decided to appoint a committee charged with presenting "models for transformation" by next May. A new committee is the medicine of choice in such cases. Meanwhile, says Campbell, the NCC must immediately get to work on urgent tasks. "They include shedding unnecessary bureaucracy, improving relations among member churches, being more responsive to the needs of local congregations, nurturing ecumenical leadership, and improving communication skills." In sum, the NCC must begin to combat the diseases with which it is afflicted.

Already, one of the council's four major program units—the Unity and Relationship Unit—has eliminated its top administrative position. That unit was in charge of interfaith dialogue, networking churches, and ecumenical education. In short, it was responsible for advancing the constituting purpose of the "ecumenical" council. Not depending alone on the "transformation" committee, the NCC brought in a financial consulting firm, Cambridge Associates. They concluded that the council is in need of, wouldn't you know it, "fundamental transformation." The main recommendation is for "downsizing" at all levels of the organization. One council official also suggested that it may be necessary to draw on the faith experiences of groups "outside our normal formulations of 'church'"—meaning groups outside the oldline churches. That may mean reaching out to evangelical Protestants and Roman Catholics, although it will be hard to persuade them that there is any good reason for climbing into the NCC sick bed, which may soon become a death bed.

Not surprisingly, money, or the lack of it, has everything to do with the illness. Decreased contributions from member churches required the NCC to cut $1.1 million from its approved $51.7 million budget. The latter figure is a bit misleading, however: $44 million of it, mainly in government relief money, goes to Church World Service (CWS). So it's really $1.1 million out of $7.7 million, and further cuts are almost certainly on the way. An additional complication is that the director of CWS has resigned, and the question is once again raised whether NCC and CWS should go their separate ways. Cutting off the $44 million received through intravenous feeding tubes will leave the NCC looking even more moribund than it does at present.

We expect that many readers do not enjoy visiting the gravely ill. Some ethicists say that when treatment becomes excessively burdensome or counterproductive our obligation is to assist the patient in killing himself. That is euthanasia, an unspeakable crime to which we ought to be uncompromisingly opposed. Institutions are very different from persons, however. The time may have come to pull the plug on the National Council of Churches. Whatever the good intentions that launched it, and whatever good things it may have done along the way of its forty-plus years, the NCC became an anger factory of politically correct and divisive agitations. In no way does it plausibly represent in American life the forty million members that belong to its member organizations. Most important, it has become an anti-ecumenical organization, increasing and hardening the divides between dispirited liberalism and the rest of the Christian community. When an institution founded to advance ecumenism turns against ecumenism, the disease is too far gone for treatment and it is time to say our goodbyes.

FT

Population and Hope for the Future

The "population bomb" alarmists are building up steam for the 1994 UN Conference on Population and Development. Which is good reason to be thankful for a recent Vatican paper on the subject. In Europe, North America, and elsewhere, the paper notes, the big problem is a decline of birth rates well below the population replacement level. This results in an aging population and severe strains on pension and medical care systems that must be supported by a shrinking work force. There is also a cultural and psychological impact. The paper asks: "What are the long-term social, cultural, economic, and ethical consequences for a society which does not replace itself? How can one assure the rejuvenation of a society which seems to have lost its desire to transmit its identity and values through a flourishing new generation? To what extent are the aging of society and a certain resistance toward encouraging childbearing mutually interrelated? To what extent do they together contribute to the evolution of a pessimistic vision of life?"

The failure of a population to reproduce itself cannot be made up for by immigration alone. In addition, says the Holy See, the "push factor" is stronger than the "pull factor" in migration patterns. "The assumption is that most people would not move if they could enjoy decent living

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conditions at home," the statement declares. So development, including trade liberalization, is the effective answer to frequently disruptive migrations of large numbers of people. In addition, the paper strongly condemns the promotion of sterilization in programs that are typically directed at the poor and ignorant, and it underscores the freedom of spouses in planning their families. The document states once again the irrefutable truth, albeit a truth often denied by the population controllers, that reduced population growth is tied to social development. As people achieve a measure of economic stability and prosperity, they tend to exercise greater planning in the number of children they have. The name of effective population control is development. That is the lesson to be learned about poor countries. As for Europe and North America, reduced population growth is no longer a goal but an increasingly serious problem.

FT

WORLD ORDERS, NEW AND OLD

We took note a while back of Aaron Wildavsky and Max Singer who together wrote *The Real World Order* (Chatham House). They offer a rather hopeful, even cheery, view of the next seventy-five years in which almost all the countries of the world will achieve a tolerable level of prosperity and democracy. Of course we have reason to hope that they're right. But there are, as you might expect, very different views. Consider, for instance, John Gray, distinguished political philosopher and Fellow of Jesus College, Oxford. Writing in *Social Philosophy & Policy*, he concludes his survey of the post-Communist world with this:

"The geopolitical circumstances in which the post-Communist states struggle toward civil society and the market economy are not propitious. If present trends are any guide, the coming century augurs, not the end of history, but a tragic epoch in which history is resumed on traditional lines, but on a yet vaster scale—an epoch of Malthusian wars and religious convulsions, of ecological catastrophes and mass deaths of a magnitude far greater even than those of our century, an epoch in which the Occidental supremacy of the past few hundred years is at length eclipsed. The challenge facing the post-Communist states is that of effecting a transition to civil society that presupposes a Hobbesian peace at a time when in most of them ancient enmities augur civil disorder and war, and when on the global scale the passing of the postwar settlement has issued not in a new world order but in a chaos of nations."

That was just in case you were having a nice day so far. Taking on the same subject from a different view is Gertrude Himmelfarb, writing on "Religion and Nationalism" in *The National Interest*. She criticizes a "liberal imagination" that is so enlightened, progressive, and finally narrow that it is incapable of recognizing the perduring force of inconvenient phenomena such as religion and nationalism. Progressives are inclined to take "the long view," but she agrees with Lionel Trilling that "'the long view' is the falsest historical view of all." Seen from a sufficient distance, wrote Trilling, "the corpses and hacked limbs are not so very terrible, and eventually they even begin to compose themselves into a 'meaningful pattern.'"

In the long view, it is said, religion and nationalism will somehow, but surely, wither away. Himmelfarb considers Francis Fukuyama, he of end-of-history fame. Fukuyama is confident that "the desire for recognition based on nationality or race is not a rational one." After the wars of religion in Europe, religion was tamed and consigned to the purely private sphere, says Fukuyama. As he puts it, "liberalism vanquished religion in Europe." The same will happen to nationalism. "Nationalism can be defanged and modernized like religion." Of course some people will continue to embrace nationalism as a matter of personal taste. "The French can continue to savor their wines and the Germans their sausages, but this will all be done within the sphere of private life alone."

Himmelfarb is not buying. She writes that "we should be inspired to seek a nationalist remedy for the diseases most incident to nationalism—not the denial of nationalism in the name of synthetic internationalism, but the affirmation of nationalism 'rightly understood,' as Tocqueville might have said: a Western-type, civic-minded nationalism, complete with checks and balances, representative government, civic liberties, the rule of law (all of which happen to be the republican remedies for the diseases of republicanism). And among these remedies (as both Tocqueville and the Founding Fathers recognized) is religion itself—or rather, a plurality of religions, religions that tolerate each other and that are themselves not merely tolerated but respected, and not merely as a private affair but as an integral part of public life."

Himmelfarb concludes: "The bloody spectacle of nationalism at its worst, a nationalism that degrades religion as well as itself, may teach us to appreciate nationalism at its best, a nationalism tempered and elevated by religion as well as by all the other resources of civilization." It is a conclusion that, in our judgment, is elevated, elevating, and eminently reasonable. We would only add that religion not only tempers and elevates human passions that can get

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nasty, but, as Tocqueville well understood, religion—meaning the Judeo-Christian forms of religion—is the foundation of the liberal democratic order. The refusal to recognize this fact is one of the most stubborn failures of intellectuals in our time. This refusal is close to being unanimous in large sectors of our culture—the university, the philanthropies, the communications media, and the courts. In American religion itself there is slight recognition of the ways in which the presuppositions of our constitutional order were originally, and are necessarily, religious in character.

Himmelfarb is not saying, and she is right not to say, that we can count on religion to come to the rescue of a nation and world set upon its way to bloody chaos. Religion is as riddled with human frailties as any other reality. Far from tempering and elevating passions, it can also inflame them. But that is a truism that most intellectuals have learned all too well. In their minds, religion is either withering away or to be contained within the sphere of privacy. In either case it is viewed almost exclusively as a threat to the public order. Given current trends, it is hard to imagine a widespread revival of Tocqueville's understanding of the connections between religion and democracy. Yet we have no choice but to work for such a revival if we are to fend off the doleful future depicted by John Gray and others.

FT

A Proliferation of Sects

The growth of religious sects in putatively Catholic Latin America has come in for a great deal of attention in recent years. Latin America has the largest concentration of Catholic population in the world, and it is understandable that developments there are of utmost concern to the Holy See. Father Frank Rodé, secretary of the Council for Dialogue with Non-Believers, has recently delivered a background paper on the phenomenon and it is getting high-level attention.

It is necessary, says Rodé, to make clear distinctions "between historical Protestant churches, Pentecostal movements, and non-Christian sects." The term "sect" should not be used for the Protestant churches. He acknowledges that "this distinction is very important and is not always respected in official declarations and documents. It must be understood that the great denominations and Christian churches must be united in their struggle against sects, which constitute a common threat for them." A quite different phenomenon, he indicates, is the long-standing existence of syncretistic groups in which people practice cults from Africa and elsewhere while, at the same time, having their children baptized and considering themselves good Catholics. This is a result, says the author, of Hispano-Portuguese evangelization being "much more tolerant than the Anglo-Saxon."

Rodé believes that the inroads made by the sects have often been exaggerated, and he discusses in some detail what he sees as their weaknesses. At the same time, he emphasizes that the situation cannot be remedied without a massive renewal of Catholic evangelization and catechesis that focuses on the distinctive beliefs and claims of the Catholic Church. As for the weaknesses of the sects, however, he says this: "A characteristic that weakens sects is lack of respect for truth. Their forcing and twisting of Holy Scripture to their fancy is well-known. Thus they lack intellectual legitimacy. And it is no accident that there are practically no intellectuals of merit in their ranks. This should limit their future spread, since an historical movement spreads in proportion to the truth it contains."

Much talk about the spread of sects is also misinformed, he indicates. "When we talk about sects, we generally insist on their continually increasing numbers and on their proliferation. But we forget that sects do not have a long life. They appear and disappear in the course of history, like those very prolific insects which last a few days or hours. How many sects are in the cemeteries of history! The same is true of their members. Many enter and leave. The difference is that they go in amidst great flurry—when they leave no one says anything. This gives the impression of continuous growth and invincible triumph. The truth is more discreet and sometimes more humiliating for them." With unabashed schadenfreude, he adds, "It is good to know it."

The Rodé document is important and well-informed, but it is not without its problems. It does not deal with the social, moral, and economic transformations that so frequently attend belonging to a sect—the kind of transformations so well documented by David Martin in his *Tongues of Fire*. In addition, despite the insistence upon clear distinctions, it remains unclear as to just what differentiates churches from sects from syncretistic religions. If by classic Reformation churches one means only such as the Lutheran, Anglican, and Presbyterian, they are hardly a significant factor in Latin America (apart from certain large Lutheran immigrant groups). How about, say, Southern Baptists or Assemblies of God? Are they sects in the meaning of this document? One remains uncertain about the answer to that.

Rodé says that theological dialogue with the sects is almost impossible because they are so hostile, so

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ignorant, and so afraid of being intellectually embarrassed. The ecumenical imperative is no doubt exceedingly challenging in such cases, but it is nonetheless the imperative to which the Catholic Church is pledged. In Latin America, only the Catholic Church bears an ecclesiology that makes work for Christian unity an integral part of the life and mission of the Church. If in its relationship to rival movements the Catholic Church descends into religious warfare, it risks losing the seriousness with which it holds to its singular claims of being Church. It risks being perceived, and in some ways becoming, a church among the churches, even a sect among the sects. We know it is too easy to offer advice from afar. But for the sake of all Christians in Latin America, present and future, the Catholic Church has the peculiar responsibility to keep alive and credible the work for Christian unity. The Rodé document helps in that connection, but much more needs to be said and done.

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THE GERMAN LESSON

The German Constitutional Court, the highest in the country, has reaffirmed that "from the beginning of pregnancy a right to life belongs to unborn human life, on the strength of its human dignity." Although the makeup of the court has changed, this is the same principle adopted by the court in a 1975 ruling that said Germans had a particular obligation to guard against the Nazi atrocities derived from the logic of abortion. The present ruling strikes down an abortion compromise reached with the former East Germany, where the Communist regime did not recognize a right to life.

That compromise law was much more protective of the unborn than is U.S. law, but, said the high court, it was not protective enough. The state, said the court, "has a duty to place itself protectively before unborn life, shielding this life from unlawful attacks by others." Abortion cannot be included in a national health insurance scheme, for that would make the "act of killing" seem normal, said the court. Not all abortions that are unlawful (*rechtswidrig*) will be criminally punished. Criminal punishment may be applicable in the later periods of pregnancy, but the goal of the court is to encourage the mother to bring her child to birth. To advance that goal, there must be a waiting period, informational counseling with a pro-life purpose, and a wide array of prenatal and postnatal social support systems.

The wisdom of the German court is of several parts. It recognizes that the debate about abortion is not just about abortion; it presumes basic beliefs about human life and community responsibility. It recognizes also that the criminalization of abortion is not enough. The goal of government and other social institutions is to reduce the number of abortions as much as possible, declaring it "unlawful" even if it is unpunished in some cases, while providing maximum incentives and helps for women to bring their children to birth. As we work to move beyond the madness of American law from *Roe* through *Casey*, we can take a lesson from the Germans. It may be the most important lesson we have to learn from the former enemies of life whom we defeated in World War II. They are now teaching us what we fought for then.

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WHILE WE'RE AT IT

■ Toward the end of his excellent *Solzhenitsyn and the Modern World* (Regnery Gateway), Edward Ericson quotes James Billington, Librarian of Congress and this year's Erasmus Lecturer. In 1980 Billington wrote in *Fire in the Minds of Men*: "The present author is inclined to believe that the end may be approaching of the political religion which saw in revolution the sunrise of a perfect society. I am further disposed to wonder if this secular creed, which arose in Judeo-Christian culture, might not ultimately prove to be only a stage in the continuing metamorphosis of older forms of faith, and to speculate that the belief in secular revolution which has legitimized so much authoritarianism in the twentieth century might dialectically prefigure some rediscovery of religious evolution to revalidate democracy in the twenty-first." Since he wrote that, the end of secular revolutionism, at least in its Marxist form, has come about. Whether the community of biblical faith is moving toward a revalidation of democracy, and just what kind of democracy *should* be revalidated, are still open questions. Ericson's employment of the Billington quote is apt, however, for he makes a good case that Solzhenitsyn, often caricatured as being antidemocratic, has important things to say about forms of democracy that can, and forms that cannot, be affirmed by believers.

■ "Everybody is at Risk." That is the message about AIDS that was broadcast for ten years. It never was true, and now even the "mainstream" media is beginning to recognize that. The facts would appear to be as Malcolm Gladwell describes them in *The*

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New Republic: "The challenge of the fight against AIDS over the next few years will be to convince Americans to continue to wage war against a disease that will probably never affect them and will only destroy those groups and people that they care least about. Had we the courage to make this argument earlier—to focus on basic health care and drug treatment rather than TV commercials for condoms and international conferences for research—there might be more people alive today." Actually, some people did have the courage to make the argument earlier. Notable, we might almost say heroically notable, among them is Michael Fumento, who has been writing for years on "the myth of heterosexual AIDS." The massive evidence of the behavior-specific nature of AIDS among gays and drug users was massively resisted for a long time. Facing the truth about how people get and transmit the disease does not eliminate the disease, but it does help contain the disease of mendacity in our political culture.

■ The ways in which the old make themselves look silly by pandering to the young is not an entirely new subject. But it is addressed trenchantly in the following item from *The Spectator* (London): "Just as the rich are now habitually expected (and very often justify the expectation) to find their deepest interest in alleviating the condition of the poor, so the old are now habitually expected to find their deepest interest in rendering the pursuits and pleasures of the young still more attractive, nor do they very often disappoint expectation. Even in literature the astonishing growth of the demand for children's books and books of adventure is one of the features of the day. More than half the old people who write at all write books for the young, and too often they make almost preternatural efforts to be young and sprightly, which sometimes end in a sort of deadly liveliness that is very mournful." (The above, it is worth noting, is from the issue of *The Spectator* dated December 10, 1892.)

■ Father Thomas Berry is perhaps the most popular "ecotheologian" on the New Age circuit of "deep environmentalism." He has received the first Sacred Universe Award, given by Spiritearth, a Center for the Sacred Universe run by a Jesuit and a St. Joseph nun. The citation reads: "Thomas Berry is a shaman, one who journeys into the far regions of the cosmic mystery and brings back the wisdom and power needed by the human community." Whether being a shaman is a step up or down from being the priest he was ordained to be is for readers to decide. As for wisdom and power coming from the far reaches of the cosmic mystery, we thought that had

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been definitively addressed in the revelation of the Word become flesh.

■ So one asks this Protestant theologian why he attends the meetings of the Catholic Theological Society of America. He answers right off, "Because I like to keep up with what is happening in liberal Protestant thinking, and that's the only place where it's still vigorous." He wasn't kidding. He did allow that the CTSA, this year meeting in San Antonio, had an excellent session or two, due to survivors of an earlier era when Catholic academic theology was more Catholic.

■ There's a new chapel down at Vanderbilt Divinity School. The All Faith Chapel was recently dedicated by Hindus, Jews, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims, the Baha'i Club, and something called Orthodox Christian Fellowship. The report reads, "Although permanent religious symbols are not incorporated into its design, storage cabinets are available to hold the accoutrements that certain traditions use in worship." At Vanderbilt religious particularism is, quite literally, in the closet. "This place is for all faiths," said University Chaplain Beverly Asbury at the dedication. "Its dedication consists of many acts and of one. There is diversity in our unity, and there is unity in our diversity as we dedicate this space and add to its light, each in the way of a distinctive tradition." There is also diversity in our diversity and unity in our unity and . . . Oh shucks, go ahead and do whatever you want.

■ Over 700 generals and colonels from the Commonwealth of Independent States (that's Russia, remember) brought their Bibles to a meeting with Western European and NATO military officials. The meeting was run by Peopleworks, an evangelical organization that promotes ordering the world, including the military, according to biblical principles. Coordinator Jeff Jernagon says, "Russians have a keen interest in Judeo-Christian belief because it is the foundation of the Western society." As a result of the spring 1993 conference—called The Russian-American Military Humanitarian Committee Conference—the American Chaplain Corporation plans to sponsor lecture exchanges with the Russians, and the Ukrainians have asked to have a similar conference in Kiev. Who would have thought a few years ago that Russians generals would be laying down their missiles and opening their Bibles? Who would have thought it of the Americans?

■ The new Surgeon General is Dr. Joycelyn Elders, who had headed up the Arkansas Department of Health. She is a great promoter of condom distribution in the schools and other measures aimed at making sex safe, healthy, and just good fun. She recently declared, "We've taught our children in driver's education what to do in the front seat, and now we've got to teach them what to do in the back seat." He knew that there were serious problems with the school system, but this writer had not realized that there had been such an exponential growth of ignorance among American young people since he was a teenager.

■ "Picket Fences" is a CBS drama that a number of stations refused to run. One episode, situated in the fictional town of Rome, Wisconsin, mocked Catholics and promoted assisted suicide. In it, a woman described in the show as a "singing serial mercy killer nun" helps ailing elderly give themselves lethal injections. The episode ridicules the town's Catholic priest and declares, through the town's doctor, that modern medicine has no answer to the pain of terminal illness except euthanasia. The nun wins support from the entire town, including the Protestant church; she is set free by the local judge, who declares the state's law against assisted suicide unconstitutional. CBS executive David Kelley said he was surprised by criticisms of the show. "Rome, Wisconsin, is Everytown USA. . . . Peel back the layers of the story lines and you'll see human values and behavior that are present in every town." Of course he's right. That's why, for these several thousand years, sensible people have worked at nurturing a project called civilization.

■ The big mistake of the pro-life movement, writes the editor of *New Oxford Review*, was to get too close to the Reagan and Bush administrations. "The fundamental problem here is that pro-lifers have bedded down with the political Right so shamelessly that respectable liberals don't want to have anything to do with them." One might opine that respectable liberals are, almost by definition, not pro-life. The exceptions, perhaps including the editor of *New Oxford Review*, seem to contain their passion for protecting the unborn within the limits of not having their liberal credentials tainted by associating with conservatives. Meanwhile, those who are more concerned about life than about labels will continue to work politically with those who are willing to work with them. It is too bad that the latter group includes so few respectable liberals. Respectable liberals who worry about that can help remedy the situation by joining up.

■ National service seems such an unexceptionable idea. Surely young people should put in a little time serving their country. Bruce Chapman, president of the Discovery Institute in Seattle, is not at all sure. He argues that the Clinton national service program will directly compete with and invade voluntary service programs, especially those that are religious. Put all the benefits together (salary, medical, college loan, and permitted private matching funds) and national service could pay $29,000 per year. Voluntary groups, including churches, will have a hard time competing with that. In addition, notes

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Chapman, concerns over the separation of church and state will likely mean that religious programs will be excluded from national service. "That means that a church or synagogue running a youth leadership program or day care center will be at a disadvantage against comparable national service programs. Quickly, the pressure will be on religious groups to secularize or spin off their service programs to make them appealing to national service." That churches might modify their programs, indeed gut them of religious meaning, in order to get government funds is hardly unprecedented. Chapman quotes Tocqueville on America's voluntary associations: "Once it leaves the sphere of politics to launch out on this new track, [government] will, even without intending this, exercise an intolerable tyranny. For a government can only dictate precise rules. It imposes the sentiments and ideas which it favors, and it is never easy to tell the difference between its advice and its commands." Chapman makes a convincing case that religious institutions in particular should take a much closer and more critical look at what is being proposed as national service.

■ This from the *National & International Religion Report*: " 'They're doing it!' reporters shouted as the Vista, California, school board quietly opened its meeting in prayer. The educational planning meetings became a spectator sport last fall when voters elected an evangelical majority. Since then, attendance has averaged 250, including reporters from the *New York Times*, CBS News, the *Village Voice*, and the Cable News Network. During the board's brief prayer, floodlights glared and camcorders whirred. 'I felt like we were doing a lewd and lascivious act in public,' Deidre Holliday, president of the five-member board, told us. News reports indicate that coverage is so heavy because some local parents, education department officials, and syndicated columnists fear that the conservative San Diego-area board will force creationism into the public schools." Well, they're already praying in public, so who knows what they'll try next.

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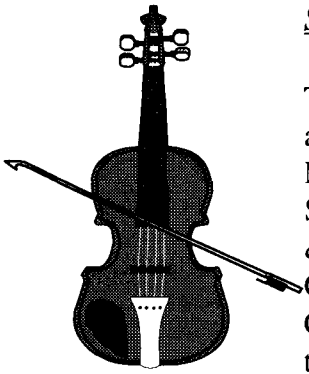

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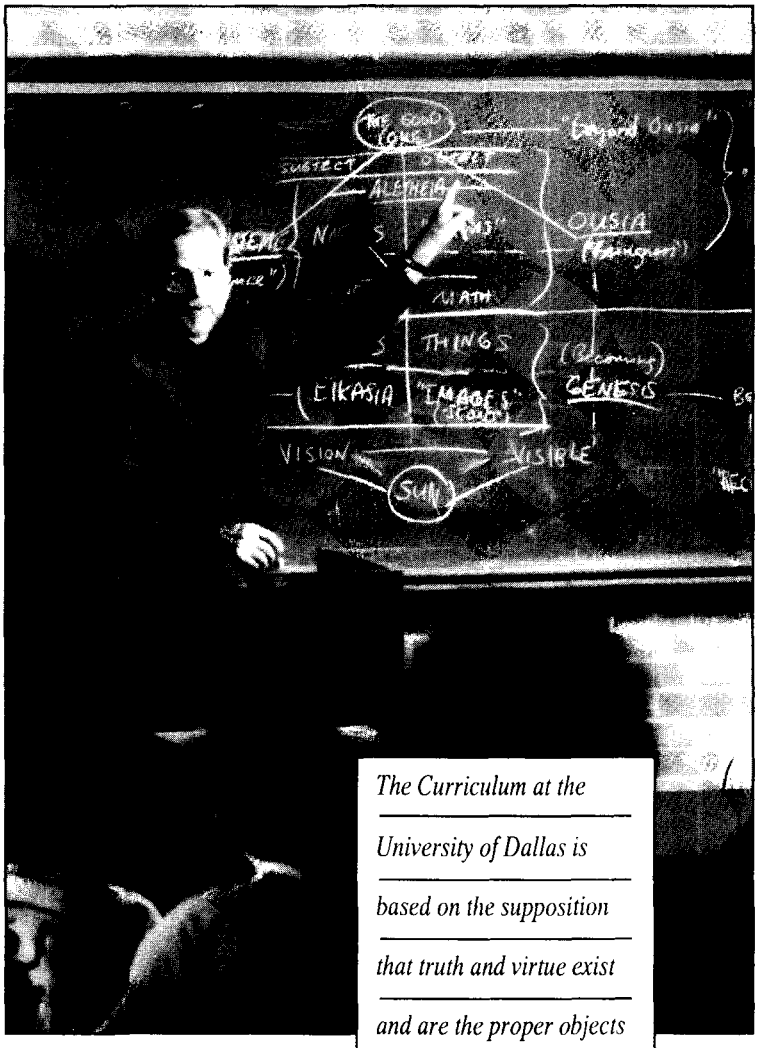

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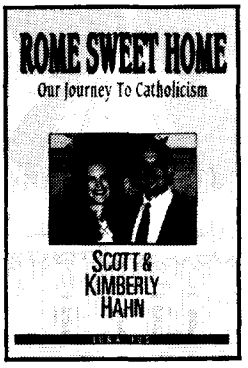

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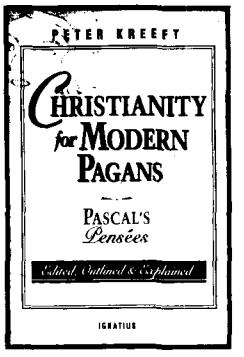

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This official commemorative coffee-table volume tells the story of World Youth Day 1993 in Denver, as well as previous World Youth Day celebrations in Spain, Poland, and Argentina. The mutual love between the Pope and youth is exemplified in this book which includes the Pope's talks at World Youth Day, along with dozens of photos of the events in Denver, and articles about the activities involving 200,000 youth. **(Available Mid Nov.)**

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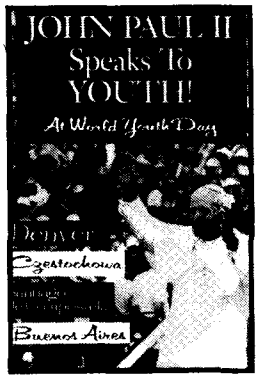

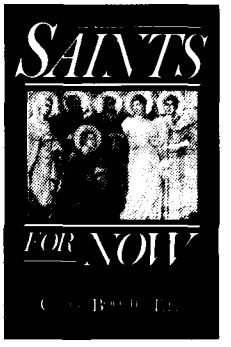

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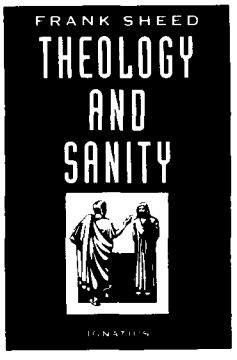

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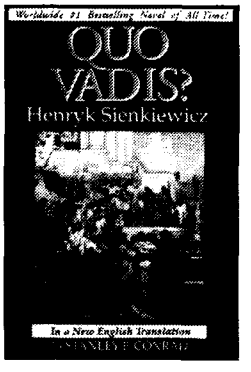

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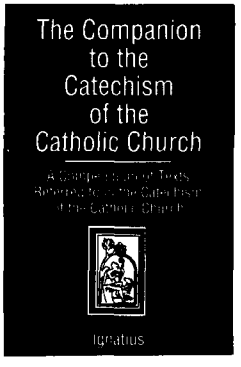

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